# FROM 'LUGAL.GAL' TO 'WANAX'

## KINGSHIP AND POLITICAL ORGANISATION IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE AEGEAN

edited by
Jorrit M. Kelder & Willemijn J. I. Waal

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# Contents

# Epilogue: Kings and Great Kings in the Aegean and beyond

## Jorrit Kelder and Willemijn Waal

## 1. Introduction

This volume set out to address the role of the ruler in Mycenaean Greece by contextualising it with contemporary Near Eastern forms of kingship. In view of its proximity to the Aegean, and the textual indications for close connections with Mycenaean (Aḫḫiyawan) nobility, the Hittite world provides a natural point of reference, as has been demonstrated by Waal (this volume). But other regions in the Near East, especially Cyprus, are of interest, too, when it comes to assessing forms of kingship in Late Bronze Age Greece – if only because academic debate regarding the political state of Cyprus at that time (whether it was politically fragmented or, in fact, unified under a single king), so closely mimics current debate on the Mycenaean world. As may be clear from the contributions in this volume, we are probably no closer to reaching a consensus on the question as to how we tally the Hittite references to an Aḫḫiyawan 'Great King' to the *wanax* known from Linear B texts, and there remain fundamental differences in interpreting the relevant archaeological record (see now also Kelder 2018). Nevertheless, it seems that, on a number of major points, there is more agreement between proponents of different academic 'schools' than has hitherto been realised, while various bones of contention appear to be more a matter of semantics than of real disagreement. This concluding chapter aims to review the main arguments of the papers in this volume and will highlight points of disagreement and common ground between the various authors, whilst advancing some ideas of our own.

## 2. Archaeological evidence

### 2.1. Cultural uniformity

One of the editors of this volume (Kelder 2005, 2010, 2012; also Eder 2007) pointed out that the striking uniformity of Mycenaean material culture throughout the Aegean, generally referred to as the 'Mycenaean *koine*', is most easily explained as the result of a certain degree of political unification. This argument has not gone unchallenged,

with some arguing (quite rightly) that cultural uniformity does not necessarily equate to political unification. Against this, one could however counter that (as Eder and Jung 2015: 113 pointed out) homogeneity is by no means self-evident and it did not exist in the preceding and succeeding periods.

As our knowledge of 'Mycenaean material culture' increases, even the concept of a Mycenaean *koine* itself is now questioned. Thus, Dickinson (this volume) notes that the apparent cultural uniformity was not absolute and that regional differences in material culture existed throughout the palace era. In addition, he points out that Mycenaean culture did not emerge overnight, but rather was the result of a long and complex process of acculturation, experimentation and borrowing. These observations, valid though they are, do not change the overall picture of a remarkable degree of cultural homogeneity (cf. Kelder 2012; Petrakis 2009: 18). In our view, it is difficult to see how local differences should necessarily be an argument against political unity. Indeed, as Kelder (2010, 2012) has argued, it could well be viewed as supporting exactly the opposite view, for one would expect precisely the 'intrusive' cultural elements -the 'imperial veneer' – to affect only those parts of day-to-day life that were directly related (subordinate) to the central administration. This, of course, could (and almost certainly did) vary through time and space, and one should expect regional differences in the pervasiveness of such an 'imperial' culture.

Dickinson argues that there is no necessary link between cultural uniformity and political unity. It is certainly true that many ancient empires did not result in cultural homogeneity, as the lack of Egyptianisation of Syria and Palestine when they were under Egyptian control, as well as the absence of Hittite culture outside the Anatolian heartland eloquently show. Dickinson concludes that a Mycenaean Empire would not have automatically resulted in cultural homogeneity and therefore the argument backwards from supposed cultural uniformity to political union is illegitimate. These are mostly valid reflections – although Egyptian overlordship in the Levant is, in our view, quite notable in the archaeological record, too – but it may be more interesting to reverse the question: do we have examples of cultural uniformity without political unity? An ancient Near Eastern example that comes to mind are the Sumerian city states of the 3rd millennium BCE, which show clear cultural, religious and artistic links. Unfortunately, our information about their political organisation is limited. The city states were each led by a king, but there seems to have been one ruler, bearing the title 'King of Kiš', who had hegemony over the other political centres (Kuhrt 1995: 41-2). Though the precise nature of this control is uncertain, some form of overarching authority did exist.

The fact that the cultural uniformity is not absolute is hardly surprising. As we noted above, any supra-regional power would not have pervaded society deeply, affecting only those parts of society that were of direct interest to the central administration. In reality, it may only have been a thin veneer of imperial control, as, e.g., in the Hittite empire (see also below). For a large part, older traditions would have continued to exist. The case of the clay figurines may serve as a good case in point. They have been found throughout the Aegean, though more in some locations than others. This uneven distribution leads Dickinson to suggest that this might reflect differences in belief, which is quite possible. This does, however, not contradict the notion of political union. Local traditions were not completely abandoned and people retained many of their traditional beliefs and customs, which could co-exist with a newly introduced state religion. The omnipresence of the

Mycenaean figurines, even if at times less prominent in remote areas, can thus also be interpreted as evidence of superregional dominance in the religious sphere, however superficial this may have been.

## 2.2. Predominance of Argive pottery

Apart from the cultural homogeneity, the predominance of pottery from the Argolid is of interest. Bányai draws attention to the fact that Mycenaean pottery during the LH IIIA period on the east Mediterranean coast stems almost exclusively from Mycenae and surrounding areas. In the LH IIIB period this picture changes: now, the exported pottery mainly stems from Thebes (see also below). As he observes, this monopoly does not concur with the idea that all palaces had an equal share in export, but rather implies a centrally organised economy (compare also Dickinson who points out that the predominance of pottery of Argive origin could be seen as a sign that Mycenae was extending its influence and control to make itself the centre of Aḫḫiyawa).

Bányai further points to the concentration of inscribed stirrup jars in Mycenae and Thebes. This skewed distribution excludes the possibility of gift exchange, as this would not explain why Thebes and Mycenae were the only recipients. Note in this respect that for Eder and Jung (2015), the stirrup jars are also evidence for the existence of a unified Mycenaean kingdom, as they are representative of a closed interregional system, and not of a free market in which the different city-states competed.

## 2.3. Architecture

Despite some differences, there is ample evidence to suggest that the Mycenaean palaces followed a common 'master plan', with a prototype stemming from the Greek mainland (as argued by Blakolmer, this volume). There is no agreement as to how the adoption of this masterplan should be interpreted, and whilst Kelder and others have suggested that this may reflect changing political allegiances, it may perhaps also be interpreted in terms of peer polity interaction and the adoption, across political boundaries, of a way to show royal power. The same might perhaps apply to other architectural features, such as the remarkable similarity between a number of royal tholos-tombs. Dickinson in his paper rightly points out that the first tholoi on the Greek mainland, as far as we know, appeared in Messenia, and that tholoi only emerged in the Argolid during LH IIA. It thus seems highly likely that building royal tombs in this way was not, originally, a properly Mycenaean way of dealing with the dead. Then again, Mycenaean 'palace culture' – that is, the culture of the 14th and first half of the 13th century BCE – was always something of a hybrid, with major cultural influences from Minoan Crete and elsewhere (including, perhaps, Messenia) reworked and reshaped in a manner that, apparently, worked for the elites in the Argolid – from whence it spread (or, if one argues for a greater Mycenaean state, was exported) to other parts of Greece. Here we should highlight the similarities between the magnificent tholos at Orchomenos in Boeotia and the famous 'Treasury of Atreus' at Mycenae: virtually all specialists (cf. Dickinson this volume; Kelder 2010; Wood 1998: 71) agree that these splendid monuments are likely to have been planned and built by the same team, but explanations for the apparent mobility and ability of such a building team to operate in different regions of Greece are markedly different. Dickinson notes that it 'is hard to understand, if, as the advocates of a single major Mycenaean state might want to contend, Orchomenos was subordinate to Mycenae: why should it alone

have such magnificent tombs, when other supposedly subordinate but major centres like Pylos and Thebes did not? But it might make sense if Mycenae and Orchomenos were separate powers, allied in their opposition to Thebes'. Here, however, one might point to the well-known practice in the contemporary Near East of establishing junior branches of the 'imperial family' at important centres in the provinces, from whence these kings could govern the region on behalf of the central 'Great King'. It is entirely plausible that Orchomenos, which likely controlled – as Dickinson himself notes – the vast agricultural expanse of the Kopais basin, was perceived as such an important asset that it warranted more or less 'direct' control by the central administration. And with that, it would have been fitted with the trappings of that central power, including a magnificent tomb for its scions of the Royal family. Possibly, close personal ties may also have played a part – but this must remain conjecture. It is impossible to know why the rulers of other centres, such as nearby Thebes and Pylos in Messenia, were not interred in similarly magnificent tombs – though it seems quite possible that Thebes, which seems 'different' from other Mycenaean centres in a number of ways and certainly appears to have been the major power in Boeotia, may have been a rather unstable and unreliable vassal (see also below), and indeed may occasionally have slipped away from Mycenaean control (all the more reason to have the Kopais basin controlled by a reliable ruler!). More importantly, *if* Thebes and Pylos and other Mycenaean palaces had been politically independent, would one not have expected similarly magnificent tombs at, at least, some of these centres, too? All of this, of course, remains impossible to prove or disprove and, as Kelder (2018) has noted, it is essentially a question of weighing probabilities, and thus inherently subjective. What may be pointed out, however, is that if Orchomenos and Mycenae were united in opposition against Thebes, the size and monumentality of Mycenae (as well as a number of other features) seem to suggest that Mycenae would have been the senior partner in this alliance. The step to a more formal relation, with Mycenae as overlord, would have been easily made, as indeed Dickinson himself seems to admit when suggesting that Mycenae may have had 'a circle of allies, some perhaps more like vassals but still technically independent' (see also below §6).

## 2.4. The supposed capital of Aḫḫiyawa: Mycenae or Thebes?

Whilst there is no consensus amongst the various contributors to this volume as to whether or not Mycenaean Greece was at some point politically unified, it is now generally accepted that there were, at least during the palatial era, two centres on the Greek mainland that stood out in terms of size, monumentality, and presumably political, economic and military might: Thebes in Boeotia and Mycenae in the Argolid. Dickinson has pointed out that the number of tholoi at Mycenae, its impressive fortifications, and a string of other features, indicate its pre-eminence amongst the Mycenaean palaces. Kelder (2010) also points to Mycenae's unique status in that it has a clearly designated 'sanctuary' within its citadel walls, although it remains unclear whom was the object of veneration at that place[1] and appears to have been the hub in an extensive network of roads. The real extent of this network requires further study, and whilst Dickinson certainly has a point

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1    In view of the proximity to Grave Circle A and the Lion Gate with its monumental 'dynastic crest' – if one is correct in interpreting the two lionesses and the central column as such – it seems plausible to assume an ancestor cult.

in questioning the validity of Kelder's statement that a network of roads connected the various regions of Mycenaean Greece (for which the evidence is, admittedly, sparse), the point remains that the region around later-day Corinth is nowadays considered to have been the hinterland of Mycenae primarily because of a (reconstructed) road connecting that palace to it.[2] Regardless of such details, the sheer quality and the great effort that was invested in the construction of the Mycenaean roads and bridges are such that they can only be reasonably be compared to the roadworks of later, Roman-era Greece; again a time when Greece was politically unified – albeit under the aegis of a foreign power.

As has been noted above, there is a general consensus that power-relations in Mycenaean Greece, whether they were in the context of a Great Kingdom including various vassal states or within a framework of numerous more or less equal, independent polities, must have shifted over the course of time. The relation between Mycenae and Thebes, especially, must have been volatile, as both are likely to have controlled large territories and both seem to have engaged in foreign trade (and perhaps diplomatic exchange). Based on, e.g., the distribution of pottery and the presence of *orientalia* at the two centres (including the remarkable lapis lazuli Babylonian cylinder seals at Thebes) Bányai suggests that whilst Mycenae may have initially acted as some sort of a hegemon over (most of) Greece, its position may have been challenged and even taken over by Thebes at some point in the 13th century BCE. Whilst this is not inconceivable, there seems to be ample evidence for the continued prominence of Mycenae during LH IIIB – indeed, the Lion Gate was constructed during this period, apparently by means of Anatolian (type) tools and perhaps people (cf. Blackwell 2014). In addition, it must be significant that only in the Argolid, though notably not at Mycenae itself, but at its principle harbour, Tiryns, there appears to have been an attempt to resurrect some sort of palace-life following the destructions at the end of LH IIIB2/early LH IIIC. The observations of Bányai might thus be better explained by assuming that Thebes was temporarily (semi)independent from Mycenae, perhaps as a break-away vassal kingdom intent on taking over hegemony over Central Greece (see also below §6).

## 3. Iconographic evidence

The contribution of Blakolmer shows that the iconography in the Bronze Age Aegean differed from that of rulers in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Power was symbolised in a very general abstract and anonymous manner, making use of a limited spectrum of 'cultural rhetorics'. As a rule, the ruler is not depicted as an individual. This non-personal collective image of power can be traced back to Minoan Crete, and Blakolmer argues no adjustments were made to conform to the Mycenaean *wanax*-ideology. The apparently 'missing ruler' in Mycenaean Crete may, Blakolmer argues, thus partly be explained by the lack of models in Minoan imagery. In addition, the *wanax* kingship probably contained a strong theocratic component, which could be a further reason for the iconographic indistinctiveness. The representation of the *wanax* may not have been allowed or deemed unnecessary.

With respect to Mycenae, though it may have taken on a leading role in the formation and development of an 'iconography of power' during the LBA, there are no unique pictorial subjects which could point to an exceptional position of its rulers. All in all, the

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2    Note that the absence of a really major centre in the Korinthia further strengthens the notion of Mycenae's lordship over the region.

lack of more explicit ruler ideology cannot be used as a conclusive argument for or against a political union. The fact that it differs from other contemporary iconographic traditions is neither troubling nor unique; the ruler iconography of the Hittite Empire is also quite distinct from that of Mesopotamia and Egypt.

## 4. Textual evidence

### 4.1. The Linear B tablets

As has often been pointed out (e.g. Postgate 2001; Palaima 2003: 159-62; Shelmerdine and Bennet 2008: 292), the Linear B tablets are strikingly uniform with respect to their script, language, scribal conventions and diplomatic features (shape, size, layout etc.), as well as their content. This is not to say, there was absolutely no room for variation. The texts are after all, produced by people, not by robots, and minor variations and local differences are only to be expected. The overall uniformity in script and language makes it likely that the scribes were trained in a particular tradition, as Dickinson notes. This observation has important consequences. Not only does it imply a very rigid training, it also suggests that we are dealing with centrally organised scribal schools. This is difficult to reconcile with the idea of various independent palatial states. What is more, uniformity of script and language may in fact be seen as an important indication of a centrally organised state (Postgate 2001). The fact that such scribal homogeny is by no means self-evident is eloquently demonstrated by the Greek Archaic period; here, there was no standardisation of the script, but within the different city-states numerous different alphabetic traditions developed – no less than 33 altogether.[3]

Not only the Linear B texts, but virtually all other aspects of administration are remarkably similar throughout the Aegean. They include the weighing and measuring system, taxation procedures and administrative practices, such as the use of seals and sealings (on which, cf. Eder 2009; Eder and Jung 2015; Bányai this volume). Following Eder and Jung, we feel that these common features imply some form of supra-regional control. Content-wise, the Linear B tablets offer little information about the political structures of Greece. Considering their strictly economic nature and limited regional scope, this is not to be expected. The texts make mention of a *wanax* and *lawagetas*, and although these titles have often been interpreted in the context of local, palace-specific officials, Kelder (2008; now followed, albeit without references, by Eder and Jung 2015) has argued that the *wanax* can be more plausibly be considered as a single, peripatetic Great King, whilst the *lawagetas* may have been a title for subordinate local (palace-specific) kings. In a similar vein, the presence of 'collectors' – a designation that is used to refer to a group of individuals that appear to have been active in several economic activities in the various Linear B archives – may lend further strength to such a scenario (Bányai this volume; Eder and Jung 2015; Kelder and Poelwijk 2016), although the argument that recurring names in various palace administrations may reflect supra-regional activity of the same persons has not ubiquitously been accepted. Regardless of all this, and whilst one could perhaps state that there is no unequivocal proof in the Linear B texts for a united Mycenaean state, it should be stressed that there is *no* evidence whatsoever in these same texts that

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3    For these different Greek epichoric scripts, see Jeffery and Johnston 1990.

argues against such a notion -there are no indications that suggest that the palaces were independent polities.

## 4.2. The Hittite texts

The above observations are all the more relevant, because there is in fact unequivocal evidence for the notion of a Mycenaean 'Great King'. This evidence stems from a number of Hittite texts; two of which specifically refer to a 'Great King' of Aḫḫiyawa, who is the 'brother' (=equal) of the king of Ḫatti. At one point, Aḫḫiyawa is listed among the Great Powers of that time in a treaty text. The status of the king of Aḫḫiyawa as Great King is confirmed by the fact that Hittite dealings with the king of Aḫḫiyawa are the same as those with other Great Kings in other respects, such as the manner of communication, gift exchange and extradition of fugitives (Waal this volume). The suggestion that the Hittite king calling the king of Aḫḫiyawa a 'Great King' was merely a case of *ad hoc* diplomacy is unfounded, and seems to have been informed primarily by the insistence of Aegeanists that the Mycenaean world was politically fragmented. There is no indication whatsoever in the Hittite texts that suggests that the Hittites – who clearly stood in close contact with the Mycenaean world – perceived the Mycenaean world as a patchwork of states. Quite the contrary: the Hittite texts clearly indicate that Aḫḫiyawa was a considerable political and military force, which was able to protect (and further) its interests in western Anatolia over the course of some two centuries with considerable success. To this, one may add the Hittites may not have been alone in regarding Mycenaean Greece as a single political entity, as the Egyptian designation for Mycenaean Greece, Tanaya/Tanaju, also seems to suggest a single coherent polity (though Crete, referred to as Keftiu, is perceived as a separate entity – possibly reflecting its erstwhile independence).

## 5. The Case of Cyprus

The academic debate on the political composition of Mycenaean Greece may be fruitfully compared to a similar ongoing debate on the status of Cyprus – known as Alašiya in contemporary cuneiform texts. For here, too, scholars disagree as to whether the island was, during the 14th and 13th centuries BCE, politically unified or whether it was instead a patchwork of independent city-states (as in later times). As in the case of the Mycenaean world, textual information is limited. Documents from Ugarit, Ḫatti and Egypt mention a king of Alašiya as well as a high official, usually translated as a commissioner or governor, who seems to have been entitled to act on behalf of the king. On Cyprus, there were several locations at which copper was produced, yet only Alašiya is mentioned in the texts, and requests for copper or royal grievances (including accusations of piracy) are directed to a single king of Alašiya. On the basis of these texts and a number of other (archaeological) arguments, scholars such as Knapp have suggested that Cyprus was at least seen as one single polity, ruled by as single king.

Other scholars, including Mantzourani, Kopanias and Voskos (this volume), however, argue instead for a decentralised model with competing local elites controlling specific territories. In this scenario, the king of Alašiya who is mentioned in the Hittite, Egyptian and Ugarit texts is to be understood as 'no more than a product of the need of Near Eastern powers to make Cypriot political structures conform, at least on paper, to their own norms of diplomatic perception and convention' (Peltenburg 2012). Mantzourani, Kopanias and Voskos suggest that the king of Alašiya was a *primus inter pares*, who was

responsible for the international relations of the islands. This function was created as a local response to the international norms, but did not necessarily reflect the actual socio-political reality on Cyprus. Though this scenario can theoretically not be excluded, one does wonder how likely and necessary the creation of such an artificial king for the outside world was. As we know from several other texts, the Hittites, for example, had no problems at all in dealing with regions whose political organisation differed from their own. In the absence of a king, they would simply conclude treaties with groups of people, as, e.g., the treaties with the Kaška people (CTH 141), the treaty with the *ḫapiru* (CTH 27) and the people of Išmirikia (CTH 133) show.

We do not feel competent to assess the archaeological picture on the island. Mantzourani, Kopanias and Voskos show that this picture is not only highly complex, but also riddled with gaps and uncertainties. The evidence thus far seems to indicate more or less distinct regional cultural differences, perhaps reflecting the presence of regional elites, vying for control over their respective territories (including, from the Late Bronze Age onwards at least, copper sources). Archaeologically speaking, there seems to be no clear evidence for anything approaching supra-regional authority.

As for the status of the king of Alašiya on the international stage, he is never called a Great King. In the Amarna letters, the Egyptian pharaoh calls the king of Alašiya his brother, but never uses the title LUGAL.GAL. Though it may at first glance appear that this designation is used somewhat arbitrarily within the Amarna correspondence, this is not the case. The term LUGAL.GAL is a title, which is only used as an apposition, or if someone is being addressed directly (see, e.g., EA 11 and EA 16). In other instances, the simple form LUGAL is used. The title LUGAL.GAL may appear in the opening lines of the letters (Thus speaks, the king of Egypt, Great King, etc.) but it can also be omitted (Thus speaks the king of Egypt…). If the title is included, it is usually used for both the addressee and the sender in the international correspondence. Exceptions are EA 1, EA 5, EA 27, EA 29 and EA 31. In these cases, the title LUGAL.GAL is missing in the first line, which is addressed to the messenger, but it is present in the opening lines of the letter itself, see, e.g., EA 1:

> 'Say [t]o Kadašman-Enlil, the king of Karadun[i]še, my brother: Thus Nibmuarea, Great King, the king of Egypt, your brother'.

Since the first line was only meant for the messenger and was not part of the actual letter, the circumstance that the title was sometimes included and sometimes was not, may be explained by a different scribal routine. The only true exception is EA 31, which is addressed to Tarḫundaradu, the king of Arzawa. He is not called Great King, whereas the king of Egypt does announce himself as such in the letter. Here, the difference was probably intentional, as the king of Arzawa was not really a Great King, but his land seemed to be a rising power at the time when the Hittite Empire was in crisis (Bryce 2005: 147-8).

If we look at the content, the correspondence between Egypt and Alašiya is quite different from that of the pharaoh with the kings of Babylon, Assyria, Ḫatti and Mitanni. The tone of the letters is business-like and they seem to be dealing with trade rather than the exchange of royal greeting gifts. Mention is made of payments in silver, which does not occur in any of the correspondence with Great Kings. It is, however, also clear that the king of Alašiya is not a vassal nor subordinate of the Egyptian king. The pharaoh is eager

to maintain a good relationship, insisting on a special treatment and getting a better deal than the king of Mitanni and Ḫatti. This desire was obviously driven by the large copper reserves of Cyprus. The image that emerges from the Amarna letters is that Alašiya was at that time independent, but certainly not a great power.

This picture concurs with the information provided by the Hittite texts. At least at one point in time, probably quite fleetingly, Alašiya was a vassal state of the Hittite kingdom. The surviving treaty between Ḫatti and Alašiya is clearly that of a Great King and his vassal. As was the case with many other vassal states, the Hittite control over the island may have been indirect and feeble. During the last period of the Hittite Empire, the Hittite reportedly conquered the island twice: at this – very late 13th century BCE – point in time, any single king ruling the entirety of the island seems unlikely, and we should probably think of political fragmentation, with new population groups (quite possibly related to the so-called Sea People) settling on parts of the island. Sites such as Pyla-Kokkinokremos and Maa-Palaeokastro may be interpreted in this light, serving perhaps as short-lived settlements or strongholds for such newcomers (and, in view of the eclectic array of objects recovered from the sites, perhaps autochthonous inhabitants, too).

Whatever the case, we feel that all these considerations make it quite clear that, regardless of the exact political organisation of Cyprus, the comparison with Aḫḫiyawa and Alašiya is not entirely justified. There are a number of important differences: first of all, the king of Alašiya is never called 'Great King' -neither by the Egyptian nor by the Hittite king. In addition, the nature of the relationship between the pharaoh and the king of Alašiya is not the same as that of the pharaoh with the other Great Kings: he is treated more like a cherished business partner than as a royal colleague. Thirdly, according to the Hittite texts, Alašiya was (even if only briefly and perhaps nominally) subordinated and conquered by the Hittite king. This stands in sharp contrast with Aḫḫiyawa, which the Hittites were never able to control nor subjugate and which they regarded and treated as their equal.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Following the discussions during the workshop and the papers presented in the current volume, we prefer a scenario in which Mycenaean Greece was, at least during the 14th and (most of) the 13th centuries BCE, unified under a single king. There is no evidence to suggest otherwise, and as long as the only clear references to Mycenaean political structures – those coming from the Hittite texts – indicate the presence of a Great King, we feel that the onus must lie with those who argue against political unity. The absence of any *unequivocal* reference to an overarching authority in the Linear B texts is a pity, but not significant.

We submit that Mycenae is, in view of the currently available evidence, the most likely candidate as capital of Aḫḫiyawa. In the absence of clear, textual evidence, its exact relation to the other palatial centres must remain conjecture, though the attribution of the title Great King (LUGAL.GAL) does suggest power relations along recognizably Hittite (and Near Eastern) lines. This brings us to a point that was already flagged above, namely that some of the discussion pertaining to the political structure of Mycenaean Greece does, to an extent at least, seem to boil down mostly to semantics rather than actual, fact-based, disagreement. Thus, Dickinson (in this volume) prefers to imagine Mycenaean Greece as a mosaic of large and small principalities, but then continues to note that 'there is no

reason why the greatest, like Mycenae itself, should not have had a circle of allies some perhaps *more like vassals but still technically independent, much as in the Hittite Empire*' (our italics). In a similar fashion Beckman et al. (2011: 6) suggest that Aḫḫiyawa was a confederation of Mycenaean kingdoms, which was led by one of the mainland states.

Dickinson's comparison with the Hittite Empire is instructive. This empire has been aptly described as a network of vassal states. With each vassal king an individual treaty was concluded. These treaties were, in the words of Gary Beckman (1999: 3) 'the ideological glue that held the Empire together'. The stipulations and obligations varied per treaty and some vassal rulers enjoyed a higher status than others. From the treaties (as well as other historical documents) it becomes clear that, outside the heartland around the Hittite capital Ḫattuša, Hittite control was often indirect and unstable. The texts painfully show how the Hittite kings struggled to maintain control over some regions. Revolts of vassal rulers were not uncommon and the reach of the Hittite Empire fluctuated over the centuries. No-one, however, seriously questions the reality of a Hittite Empire. The Egyptians, who fought the Hittites at Kadeš, certainly did not, nor did the Assyrians.

The Mycenaean situation could have been very similar to the Hittite one, including the occasional uprisings of vassal rulers, who longed for independence, such as Thebes. The position of this powerful vassal state may, for instance, be compared to the important Hittite vassal state Tarḫuntašša, which at some point begot the status of a viceregal kingdom. For a short-lived period (during the reign of Muwatalli II) the Hittite royal seat was even moved from Ḫattuša to this region (Bryce 2005: 230-233).

As far as we can see, some of the reluctance amongst Aegeanists to consider the Mycenaean world along such Hittite lines may be the result of that other contentious theme of Greek prehistory; the question as to whether or not (and if so, to what extent) Homer reflects Bronze or Iron Age reality. Indeed, in numerous contributions on the 'Aḫḫiyawa Question', the shadow of Homer's epics looms large, though it appears to be used in myriad ways, both against and in favour of any of the arguments made above. As the discussions in this volume demonstrate, there is no need to involve Homer in a discussion on Great Kingship and political structures of Mycenaean Greece: the argument for a Mycenaean Great King stems not from Homer, but from the Hittite texts. Nor is there any need to invoke 'the landscape' of Greece as an argument against greater political unity – suffice to state that the landscape of western Anatolia (where we do have clear evidence for the emergence, both in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age, of supra-regional polities) is quite similar to mainland Greece.

We acknowledge that, with the currently available evidence, any assessment of political structures in Mycenaean Greece during the 14th and 13th centuries BCE is mostly a question of weighing probabilities – and thus inherently subjective. Nonetheless, we believe that the argument for a unified Great Kingdom is attractive not only because it accommodates the evidence from the Hittite texts, but also because it is entirely consistent with both the archaeological data and the Linear B evidence. Importantly, it does not require special pleading (e.g., dismissing the Hittite attribution of the title Great King as 'Realpolitik') to make all the evidence fit. Another advantage of this model is that Greece would no longer be an anomaly of its time with respect to its political organisation. In the Late Bronze Age, the ancient Near East – of which the Aegean formed an integral part – was dominated by great powers, each controlling several vassal states. In this setting, a constellation of small, independent Mycenaean kingdoms would have been highly

exceptional. A Greece unified under the rule of a single Great King with numerous vassal rulers governing hitherto independent principalities in the provinces, by contrast, would have been nothing out of the ordinary.

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