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AHHIYAWA AND THE WORLD OF THE GREAT KINGS:
A RE-EVALUATION OF MYCENAEAN POLITICAL STRUCTURES

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It can no longer be realistically doubted that 'Ahhiyawa' in Hittite texts must refer to one or several of the Greek Mycenaean palatial states. Recent evaluations of the available textual and archaeological evidence, and especially an improved understanding of the geography of western Anatolia during the Late Bronze Age, rule out the erstwhile popular hypothesis that Ahhiyawa was an Anatolian entity. Whilst the identification of Ahhiyawa with (parts of) Mycenaean Greece is no longer seriously challenged, debate continues to rage over the territorial extent and the political status of Ahhiyawa. This article seeks to explore some possible models of Ahhiyawan political organisation and the place of Ahhiyawa in the world of the Late Bronze Age Great Kings.

Status questionis

Any discussion about the political composition of Mycenaean Greece must begin with an evaluation of the available evidence. Our understanding of Mycenaean political structures is based primarily on analyses of Linear B texts. Most of these texts stem from the palatial archives of Knossos, Pylos and Thebes, and record the flow of goods and the deployment of manpower throughout the hinterland of the respective palaces. References in the Linear B texts to centres or regions further afield are scarce. As such, the tablets represent the day-to-day administration of the palaces; they were never meant to be kept for long (the tablets were accidentally baked in the fires that destroyed the palaces) and concern predominantly (local) economic aspects of palatial administration (cf. Shelmerdine 1998, 89). It is important to stress the limited scope of the Linear B evidence, as much of what is currently thought regarding Mycenaean political structures is based on analyses of these texts. This includes the long-held belief that Mycenaean Greece was politically fragmented, and that each of the Mycenaean palaces ruled its own patch of land as an independent polity (cf. Shelmerdine/Bennet 2008, 289-291). This model has always been problematic (for example because it was difficult to see how the many palaces in the plain of Argos, all situated about a stone's throw from each other, could have remained independent from each other), but it has remained popular amongst both archaeologists and Linear B specialists to this

very day¹. On the basis of archaeological evidence, the astounding degree of cultural unity throughout Mycenaean Greece (which includes palatial architecture, ceramic styles, script and language, and religion) has been attributed to ‘peer polity’ contacts; thus supporting the model of various culturally identical yet politically independent states (cf. Wright 2006, 37; Nakassis/Galaty/Parkinson 2010, 240). The point that various large-scale infrastructural works (most notably the drainage of the Kopais basin in Boeotia, and the evidence for a well-developed network of roads in, especially, the Argolid) are difficult to reconcile with the modest amounts of resources and manpower that, according to the Linear B texts, would have been available to the individual palaces is usually ignored, whilst the uniformity of the palatial administration *throughout* Greece (not only the way of recording, but also the sizes and shapes of the clay tablets, and which, as Nicholas Postgate [in: Killen/Voutsaki 2001, 160] noted, to a Near Eastern archaeologist appear to indicate political unity) is again interpreted as a result of the close interaction of palatial elites.

The argument for a politically fragmented political landscape during the Late Bronze Age thus seems to be based on assumptions, rather than facts. This, of course, does not mean that the argument is flawed, but it does justify a critical reassessment of the facts and of the methodology that is used to support this argument².

Such a reassessment of the evidence becomes urgent in the light of 26 Hittite texts, which refer to the large territorial entity called Ahhiyawa, and its (often bellicose) interaction with the Kingdom of the Hittites. Although it has often been argued that Ahhiyawa must have lain on the Anatolian west coast, recent research indicates that Ahhiyawa should be sought in the Aegean – most probably on the Greek mainland (see Hawkins 1998; Niemeier 1998). The Hittite texts do not stand alone; a small corpus of Egyptian inscriptions also indicates the presence of a large polity in the Aegean – although the Egyptians refer to this land as ‘Tnj’ (vocalised as Tanaju) (cf. Phillips 2011 and Cline/Stannish 2011).

Whilst these text do not indicate *where* in the Aegean Ahhiyawa and Tanaju should be sought, it is clear that Ahhiyawa must have been a land of major importance during the period 1400-1220 (the period covered by the Hittite texts): the texts refer to several Ahhiyawan incursions in western Anatolia (an area that was claimed by the Hittite crown), as well as the exchange of messengers between the Hittite and Ahhiyawan courts. In one of these texts, the so-called Tawagalawa Letter (probably dating to the reign of Hattusili III), the ruler of Ahhiyawa is des-

¹ Since there appears to be little or no difference between the Linear B texts found in the Argolid (Mycenae and Tiryns) and those that were found at palatial centres elsewhere in Greece (e.g. Thebes, Pylos), it is difficult to see how (essentially the same) Linear B evidence is, in Messenia and Boeotia, used as evidence for political fragmentation (one palace equals one state), whereas in the Argolid, the evidence is apparently consistent with a unified model.

² Cf. Kelder 2008, for a discussion of various methodological problems, such as the equation of palatial administrative purview as evidenced in the Linear B texts with political borders.

ignated as a ‘Brother’ of the King of Hatti, and as a ‘Great King’; a title that was only bestowed upon the most powerful rulers of the ancient world (such as the Kings of Egypt, Assyria, and Hatti itself). A slightly later text also lists Ahhiyawa as a Great Kingdom, but that entry was subsequently erased.

The attribution of the title ‘Great King’ (LUGAL.GAL in the texts) to the King of Ahhiyawa is significant. As has been noted above, the title was used by only a handful of Near Eastern rulers; all of whom exercised rule over large swathes of land, including various subservient kingdoms or vassal states. It thus seems logical to suppose that Ahhiyawa – wherever one is inclined to situate it – was organised along the same, Near Eastern, lines. In other words: Ahhiyawa must have included a core-state (a heartland) that was ruled directly by the Great King, and several vassal states. The status of the vassal Kings may have varied per region, as it did in contemporary Near Eastern Kingdoms: some rulers may have been members of indigenous ruling houses, retaining most of their former powers, whereas other vassals may have been installed by their overlord, and may have been on a much tighter leash. The question is whether there is any direct evidence for such a state in Mycenaean Greece, or whether this may have been a Hittite take on different, Mycenaean power structures.

The reliability of the Hittite texts

In view of the fact that the Hittite texts suggest a totally different political situation (i.e. a Great Kingdom) in Mycenaean Greece than what was, until recently, generally thought to have been the case (i.e. a patchwork of relatively small but independent palatial states), the reliability of the Hittite texts needs to be established. To do so, we first need to look at the ways in which diplomatic texts, such as (most of) the Ahhiyawa texts, were composed. Numerous studies have focused on the archives at Boghazköy (and other ancient palatial sites, most notably El Amarna in Egypt) and its implications for our understanding of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East during the Late Bronze Age. As a result of these studies, our understanding of international diplomacy during this era, and the role of (written) correspondence in the world of the Great Kings, has increased dramatically over the past few decades³. It has become clear that the Hittite diplomatic texts, including those on Ahhiyawa, were exclusively meant to convey important messages from one ruler to another and not to boast about the might of their sender. These texts were not meant as propaganda, but served specific business and/or diplomatic aims, and were carefully composed to achieve these aims. The evidence from Boghazköy, especially, suggests that some letters (particularly those that concerned sensitive topics, such as perceived insults or the inadequate reception of envoys) went through various stages of drafting, before being approved by the sender (the King or Queen) and dispatched. Since virtually all of

³ E.g. Cohen/Westbrook 2002; Bryce 2003. See now for an overview of Hittite-Ahhiyawan diplomatic texts; Beckman/Bryce/Cline 2011.

the written correspondence between the Great Kings of the ancient Near East was written in Akkadian, the composition of diplomatic letters was a sensitive matter and, normally, the reserve of specialised scribes (Bryce 2003, 60-61). In view of all this, there is nothing to suggest that the Ahhiyawa texts do not reflect Late Bronze Age reality, or at least the perception of the Hittite King (and his immediate circle of advisors) on the political situation between Ahhiyawa and Hatti. Consequently, the texts need to be taken seriously, and cannot be dismissed out of hand as evidence when reconstructing the political situation in Mycenaean Greece.

Ahhiyawan political structures

Clearly, then, the Hittites perceived the existence of a large territorial state, which they knew as Ahhiyawa, somewhere in the Mycenaean world; a state that was capable of withstanding Hittite military and political pressure in western Anatolia over the course of almost two centuries (1400 to 1220), and with a clearly definable ruler – the Great King – that corresponded with Hattusili III⁴. The texts do not clarify, however, the internal workings of this Ahhiyawan state; the ways in which the various territories were tied to each other, and the degrees to which they were dependent on the Great King.

It is precisely this ‘gap’ in information that has led some scholars (most recently Eric Cline (in: Beckman/Bryce/Cline 2011, 6)) to suppose that Ahhiyawa may have been a confederation; a league of palatial states, much like the later Delian-Attic League (a comparison drawn by both Cline and, earlier, in 1978, Christopher Mee). The beauty of this model is, as Cline notes, “that one is not forced to part ways with the evidence (*sic!*) of the Linear B tablets for multiple small Mycenaean Kingdoms”. This model would also compare well with the contemporary (Anatolian) state of Assuwa, “which the Hittites themselves indicate was a confederation of twenty-two smaller cities and states in north-west Anatolia during the later-fifteenth century B.C.E.” Moreover, the concept of a confederation tallies well with the later, Homeric tradition, with Agamemnon as *primus inter pares* amongst the various Greek lords. Although this model of a confederation of Mycenaean states under the leadership of Mycenae may appear to be quite plausible, it has two weaknesses.

The first weakness is methodological. Despite claims to the contrary, there is no evidence whatsoever in the Linear B texts for multiple small Mycenaean Kingdoms: it is methodologically unsound to equate administrative borders (and then only of an administration that is demonstrably limited in scope and time) with political borders. On the contrary, the presence of two officials – the *wanax* and the *lawagetas* – at the top of Mycenaean society, both of which have essentially the same (military, economic and cultic) functions, is difficult to reconcile

⁴Most recently, Cline (in: Beckman/Bryce/Cline 2011, 4-6). See also Kelder 2010b; 2008; 2005; and Eder 2009; 2007, 96 (esp. note 111) for archaeological arguments in favour of Mycenaean unity.

with the model of various smaller and independent palatial states. The numerous (and as far as I can see, unconvincing) attempts to make a clear distinction between the two officials, other than the size of their respective *temene* (at Pylos, the *wanax*'s is thrice the size of that of the *lawagetes*), clearly illustrate that there is no real consensus on the exact position and status of either of them⁵. The presence of two throne-rooms, usually thought to have been the official residence of the *wanax* and *lawagetes*, at the palaces of Mycenae, Pylos and Tiryns, adds to the uneasy sense of duplicity: if we are indeed dealing with various smaller states, then all of these states apparently had two ruler-like figures at the head of society, residing in almost identical structures that were built virtually next to each other. I find this scenario extremely unlikely, and I know of no anthropological or archaeological parallel. The presence of two, very similar, ruler-like figures at the head of each of the Mycenaean palatial realms would, in my opinion, more plausibly be explained if we envision these realms as part of a single state; a Great Kingdom, comprising various smaller (and previously independent) kingdoms. In such a scenario, the Great King could plausibly be equated with the (peripatetic) *wanax*, and the local king with the *lawagetes*. The beauty of this model is that it fits well with the Linear B evidence, the architectural remains of the (double) palaces, the presence of remarkably well-constructed Mycenaean roads throughout Greece (which must have greatly facilitated travelling through Greece's rocky landscape) and with the references to the Great Kingdom of Ahhiyawa in the Hittite texts. It also has the advantage that there are anthropological and historical parallels for such a model, such as the Frankish Kingdom of Charlemagne (with the Pfalzen throughout the Empire serving as temporary courts when the Emperor visited) or – closer to home – the Kingdom of the Hittites itself (in which case we could compare citadels like Tiryns and Pylos with centres such as Carchemish as *Sekundigenituren*⁶). The fact that we do not know the names of any of the rulers (either *wanax* or *lawagetes*) means that we simply cannot establish whether or not the *wanax* at Pylos was the same person as the *wanax* at Mycenae. The same goes for the *lawagetes*. In sum, the Linear B evidence may not prove the existence of a greater state, but it certainly does not contradict it either.

The second argument against the identification of Ahhiyawa as a confederation of Mycenaean states is that it remains unclear what this 'confederation' entails. Comparing Ahhiyawa with the Delian-Attic League only adds to the confusion, since this League is (especially in its later stage) often described as 'the Athenian Empire' – nominally perhaps a conglomerate of peers, but effectively a unified state with a centralized administration (and, eventually, treasury) at Athens. Regardless of the validity of a comparison with the Delian-League, it is quite

⁵ E.g. Palaima 1995; see Hooker 1979 for a critical assessment of the occurrence of the *wanax* in Linear B texts.

⁶ First suggested in Kelder 2005 and 2010b, 97, now followed (for Tiryns) by Crouwel 2009.

clear that the Hittites themselves did not compare Ahhiyawa with the Assuwan Confederation: the Hittite texts designate the King of Ahhiyawa as a LUGAL.GAL; a Great King (cf. Bryce 2003, 210). This is significant not only because of the sheer status of this title and the reluctance of Hittite Kings to attribute the same title to, for example, the King of Assyria, but also because the Assuwa League is *not* referred to as a Great Kingdom. Since both Assuwa and Ahhiyawa appear to have stood in regular contact with the Hittites, it is difficult to see how the King of Hatti would correctly identify the ruler of Assuwa as the leader of a confederation, but then fail to designate the ruler of a similar – and nearby – land in the same manner. Comparing Ahhiyawa to Assuwa or the Delian-Attic League thus seems unwarranted, and goes beyond (and, indeed, against) the available evidence.

Thus, despite the fact that it seems unlikely that Ahhiyawa was a ‘League’ or a ‘Confederation’, it appears quite plausible that Ahhiyawa was a conglomerate state; but then organized along more formal and hierarchical lines – as a Great Kingdom. As has been highlighted above, there is nothing in the Linear B texts that argues against this notion. Indeed, some peculiarities (such as the apparent ability of some palaces, like Pylos, to engage in (military?) actions in regions well beyond the borders of their respective organizational boundaries, and the aforementioned presence of two king-like figures at the head of palatial societies) are better explained in the context of a Great Kingdom, than in the context of a patchwork of petty states. That does not, however, mean that there are no questions left to answer.

Modalities of diplomatic contact

On the whole, the concept of a unified Mycenaean world under the Aegis of a single Great King appears plausible enough. The ‘heartland’ of the Great King may reasonably be identified as the Argolid, with Mycenae as the official seat of power: the monumentality of its citadel, the Lion Gate and the unsurpassed quality and quantity of its *tholos* tombs, as well as the archaeological evidence for far-flung foreign contacts (of which a number of Egyptian imports particularly stand out) indicate Mycenae’s unique position in the Late Bronze Age Aegean world⁷. To ensure a reasonable level of control throughout the realm, the Great King of Mycenae may well have been peripatetic; travelling to the various palatial centres of the realm to dispense justice, install new officials, to participate in important festivals, and, to renew the bonds between the local elite and their overlord. As has been noted above, this may explain the presence of two *megara* at Pylos and Tiryns, and the quality of the roads of Mycenaean Greece.

As long as no Mycenaean diplomatic texts and royal decrees are found at the palatial archives, however, the question as to how a Mycenaean Great King controlled his realm will remain a matter of conjecture. The possible modalities by which

⁷ Cf. Latacz 2010 for Thebes as heartland; but see Eder 2009 and Kelder 2010b for arguments against Thebes and in favour of Mycenae. See now Cline (in: Beckman/Bryce/Cline 2011) for an evaluation of the various arguments.

Ahhiyawan-Hittite correspondence might have been carried out are equally difficult to explain, although comparisons with contemporary diplomatic customs in the Near East may shed some light on that matter. This specific issue has most recently been addressed by Craig Melchert, during a conference on the topic at the Concordia University at Montreal, Canada. In his lecture, Melchert made a number of important observations, such as the point that KUB 26.91 (the Ahhiyawa letter that is now generally thought to have been sent *by* the Ahhiyawan King to the King of the Hittites⁸) is “written in standard Boghazköy *ductus* and so far as the extant text is concerned, in quite idiomatic Hittite of the Neo-Hittite period”. Drawing parallels with Egyptian texts that were sent to Hattusa, Melchert concludes that the Ahhiyawan message must have been put to clay by a Hattusa-based scribe, probably for the purpose of drafting replies (Melchert [forthcoming], citing Edel 1994, 2.320). That the original message that was sent by the Ahhiyawan King was written (and not orally transmitted) is, as Melchert remarks, beyond doubt: the verb used by the King of Ahhiyawa is *ḫatrā(i)-*, which means ‘to send a *written* communication about’⁹.

The implications of this point are immense, for it means that – like all the other Near Eastern courts, the Ahhiyawan/Mycenaean court must have employed professional scribes. The question is: which language did these scribes use for their overseas correspondence? There are indications (such as the Hittite correspondence between Amenhotep III and Tarhuntaradu of Arzawa in *EA* 31 and 32) that some royal scribes also mastered foreign languages other than Akkadian (and that correspondence between various royal courts could, consequently, also have been written in languages of the respective correspondents). However, deviating from the common practice of writing to one’s peers in Akkadian almost certainly had negative implications for the status of the correspondent(s) and, in principle, was to be avoided. This observation has led Melchert to believe that the correspondence between Ahhiyawa and Hatti was not, originally, written in either Hittite or Mycenaean Greek. Whilst I find that proposition entirely plausible, the ensuing suggestion that messages between the two courts may have been conveyed orally by messengers to the frontiers of both realms and there translated and written down by trusted scribes, seems to ignore the (in my opinion) far more probable scenario that both sides employed scribes who were skilled in Akkadian (*pace* Bryce 1999, 258).

Although hard evidence for the presence of such scribes in Mycenaean Greece is

⁸ A suggestion first made by Starke (at the conference at Concordia University; proceedings are forthcoming), but so far only mentioned in academic literature by Latacz. Starke’s full argument, that the Ahhiyawan King’s forebear may have listened to the name of ‘Kadmos’ has, however, met with scepticism (cf. Katz 2005, Kelder 2007 and Melchert [forthcoming]).

⁹ This does not mean that orally transmitted correspondence between the two courts did not exist, or was insignificant. The evidence from the Amarna Archive, for example, suggests that written messages were usually presented by trusted messengers, who were given some leeway to achieve diplomatic targets.

lacking, the recent discovery at Tiryns of an inscription in (what is most probably) Ugaritic suggests that cuneiform script (and at least one Semitic language, Ugaritic¹⁰) was known in the Mycenaean world. The wealth of archaeological evidence for close trading connections between Late Bronze Age Greece and the Levant, and the adoption of Semitic and Hittite words in Mycenaean Greek (Woodard 1997, 38), lend further credibility to this concept. However, so long as no diplomatic texts have been found at Mycenae or any of the other Mycenaean centres, any statement about the language in which Mycenaean–Hittite diplomacy was conducted must remain conjecture. A possible explanation for the dearth of Mycenaean diplomatic mail in the archaeological record is that they simply have not yet been found (cf. Cline 2010, 179), but considering the extensive explorations at Mycenae and other palatial centres, this seems hardly realistic. At the same time, it is quite possible that the erosion of (especially the eastern part of) the palace at Mycenae has destroyed the local archive: if Mycenae was indeed the capital of Ahhiyawa, then this would also explain why archaeologists have failed to find the Ahhiyawan ‘foreign diplomatic archive’.

The absence of diplomatic archives (concerning ‘home affairs’, such as relations between the various palatial centres and their overlord) at other palaces is, however, more difficult to explain. Indeed, the absence of such texts has been quoted as evidence for the political independence of the Mycenaean palaces. Although that model of various smaller and independent palatial states can now be rejected on other grounds (cf. *supra*), the absence of local diplomatic archives remains problematic. It may be argued that such archives never existed and that messages between local rulers and their overlord were transmitted orally, but this seems unlikely (in view of the use of Linear B for the palatial administrations). Alternatively, it may be argued that diplomatic texts were written on perishable material and that these records have been lost. It seems unlikely that these texts were written on clay tablets, since other (non-diplomatic) texts have been found in quite significant number at various Mycenaean palaces (and one would have expected some diplomatic texts to have survived, too). It seems equally unlikely that wax tablets, such as those specimens that have been found in the Uluburun shipwreck (where there are strong indications for Mycenaean on board: Bachhuber 2006, 352–356; Pulak 2005), and referred to in the Bellerophon legend, were used for diplomatic texts, since they could be easily erased or altered (although they could, of course, be sealed)¹¹.

Recent research has, however, suggested that wooden writing boards may have been used extensively in Anatolia from the Middle Bronze Age onwards. Although none of these writing boards have survived, Hittite words such as

¹⁰ The text is inscribed on a piece of ivory, which possibly served as a measuring rod, or – more likely – an ivory label. Cf. Cohen/Maran/Vetters 2010, 11–12.

¹¹ Although wax tablets may well have served as a medium for transactions and other commercial texts, which would (at least partially) explain the absence of Mycenaean merchant texts (as noted by Cline 2010).

LÚ_{DUB.SAR.GIŠ} ('scribe-on-wood') and frequent references to wooden documents in Hittite texts (Waal 2011, 31) demonstrate their wide-spread use in Anatolia, especially in connection with Anatolian Hieroglyphic writing. That wooden tablets were also used in regions of Ahhiyawan influence is indicated in the so-called 'Milawata Letter' (CTH 182; AhT 5, §7.38), which was probably sent by Tudhaliya IV to the ruler of Millawanda/Milawata¹²:

Kulana-ziti retained possession of the wooden tablets that [I made] for Walmu, and he has now brought them [down] to (you), My son!
(translation: Beckman/Bryce/Cline 2011).

In this text, wooden tablets are used by the Hittite King as some sort of a warranty for Walmu's claim to the throne of Wilusa; a Kingdom in the north-western part of Anatolia that is now commonly identified as (W)Ilion/Troy. The fact that the Hittite King used wooden tablets for such an important document suggests that wood may have been used more frequently than has hitherto been thought; perhaps especially for documents that were expected to 'travel' (such as the 'passport' for Walmu, but – as Waal, drawing parallels with a corpus of later Roman wooden texts found at Vindolanda, has argued – also for commercial and diplomatic correspondence). It is not difficult to see why wooden tablets may have been used extensively for conveying messages in, perhaps especially, western Anatolia: they would have been sturdier than clay tablets and the 'raw material' would have been just as widely available as clay¹³. These observations are also valid in the context of Mycenaean Greece, where there are, moreover, indications for the use of other perishable materials such as animal skin and sedge (*cyperus rotundus* or *cyperus longus*), mentioned various times in Linear B texts¹⁴. Indeed, it has been argued that the shape of the Linear B script itself points towards use other than on clay (Chadwick 1976, 27).

Conclusion: Ahhiyawa and its place in the 'International Age'

In view of the observations made above, I now find the concept of an Ahhiyawan King communicating with his vassals in Mycenaean Greek (Linear B on wooden tablets), whilst corresponding with his Hittite peer in Akkadian (cuneiform on clay tablets) entirely plausible; although this concept must remain hypothetical. The point that I wish to make here is that there is no reason to assume, as has so

¹² Ahhiyawan sovereignty over Millawanda had, at that point been lost; the addressee is probably Tarkasnawa of Mira, a Hittite vassal.

¹³ There is a growing body of evidence that indicates that Anatolia, including the region around the Hittite capital Hattusa, was thickly forested during the Empire period. See Schachner 2011, 41, 160 (ill.70).

¹⁴ Rendered *ku-pa-ro* in Linear B, sedge may have been used for a variety of purposes, including (animal) fodder (the plant is edible), but also as a writing material (with qualities similar to papyrus). Cf. Chadwick/Ventris 1973, 223-224, 441.

often been done, that Mycenaean society was inherently different from its better known Near Eastern contemporaries. To my mind, the available evidence suggests that Mycenaean Greece was very much a part of, as it has been dubbed, the ‘International Age’: Mycenaean objects have been found virtually everywhere on the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean whereas Aegean influences on Near Eastern art have long been recognized. That Aegean style influences are notably strong on objects that have been identified as ‘prestige gifts’ (i.e. objects that were specifically designed to grease diplomatic relations, cf. Feldman 2006), further supports the concept that Mycenaean Greece must have been an important player of the international diplomatic scene¹⁵.

In sum, the available evidence allows for a reconstruction of the Mycenaean world along very ‘Near Eastern’ lines. There is no evidence to suggest that the Hittite perception of the Mycenaean world was incorrect; that a single Great King could not have ruled several, or perhaps all, palatial realms. It has been demonstrated that the archaeological evidence does not at all argue against such a model; if anything, archaeology seems to support the notion of some degree of overarching control. At the same time, it has been demonstrated that the evidence from Linear B texts is of limited value in reconstructing the political structures of Mycenaean palatial society. There is nothing in the texts that argues against political unity, quite the contrary in fact, as several features of the Linear B administration at palatial centres such as Pylos, Knossos and Thebes (such as the remarkable uniformity of the shape and size of the Linear B tablets) are best explained by in the context of political unity.

As long as no diplomatic archives are found within the Mycenaean world itself, the political layout of this Mycenaean unity must remain a matter of conjecture, as relations between the various Mycenaean palaces may well have fluctuated over time and space. However, the Hittite attribution of the title ‘Great King’ to the ruler of Ahhiyawa around the mid-13th century must be considered to be significant; the title was not lightly bestowed upon anyone, and strongly suggests that Ahhiyawa, at least at that point in time, was a formidable power to reckon with. The fact that Ahhiyawa was able to pursue its interests in western Anatolia with considerable success over the course of almost two centuries (*ca.* 1400 to 1220), adds to this impression.

To conclude: whilst none of the scenarios that have been discussed above can, at this point, be conclusively rejected or accepted, the growing body of circumstantial evidence for a unified Mycenaean state now seems overwhelming.

¹⁵ The number and quality of, especially, Egyptian objects that have been found at Mycenae further indicate its dominant position in the Late Bronze Age Aegean, and strongly suggest a ‘special relation’ with Egypt (cf. Cline 1995; Philips/Cline 2005; Kelder 2009; Kelder 2010a).

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