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# RETHINKING THE MEDITERRANEAN

*Edited by*  
W. V. HARRIS

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## PREFACE

How useful is the Mediterranean Sea as an intellectual construct? And how should it be studied? Nearly sixty years after the publication of Fernand Braudel's first great book, and some forty years after the Mediterranean became a major category in anthropology, these questions continue to trouble and intrigue us. For those of us who study the ancient world or the Middle Ages, the questions are particularly pressing. In consequence, they have in recent times figured quite often in the merry-go-round of academic conferences. One such conference was organized by the Center for the Ancient Mediterranean at Columbia University on 21 and 22 September 2001.

The book you have before you consists for the most part of the proceedings of that meeting. All of the orally delivered papers have been revised, in some cases substantially. Three others are additions: I was fortunate enough to find David Abulafia, whose work I have long admired, willing to contribute a paper, even though he had not been among the attendees in New York (the cast consisted mostly of *antichisti*); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell have written an extra essay in response to the reviewers of their recent book *The Corrupting Sea* (2000). Finally, I have taken the opportunity provided by the period of revision to crystallize my thoughts on this subject and put them together as an introduction; I thank Susan E. Alcock in particular for helping me to do this.

In the interests of preventing further delays, matters have been so organized that none of the contributors saw either my introduction or Horden and Purcell's response to critics before they finished their own contributions. Horden and Purcell did not read my essay, and I have not altered it since I read theirs. So there will no doubt be plenty of material for later responses. But we have already been compelled by various circumstances to wait quite long enough. And it was never of course our intention to produce an agreed body of doctrine. If there are unresolved conflicts between some parts of the book and

## The Eastern Mediterranean in Early Antiquity

*Marc Van De Mieroop*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

'Mediterraneanism' involves itself with a region, and as such it needs to define its subject of study and set its borders. While the aim of the approach is to be trans-historical—inspired as it is by Braudel's *longue durée*—it should be obvious that historical circumstances defined what belonged to the Mediterranean world at any given point in time. Political and economic conditions determined what regions were in contact with those at the Mediterranean shores, and these changed over time. While the Mediterranean might be a timeless and trans-historical concept, what falls within its reach is not. In his study of the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II, Fernand Braudel could include the Flemish city of Antwerp, but no one would claim that city to have been a Mediterranean one throughout its history.

Human agency thus defines the limits of the Mediterranean world, and the reach of people of that world depended on historical circumstances. In their book *The Corrupting Sea*, Horden and Purcell stressed the concepts of micro-region and interconnectivity. The small zones that make up the Mediterranean world are connected to one another to an extent that depends on the activities of the humans inhabiting them. The geographical extent of those connections varies—and therefore what can be called the Mediterranean world changes. At times the focus of that world could be outside Europe, in the regions of Asia and Africa that are often somewhat marginalized in Mediterranean studies.

As an example of such a situation, I will discuss the Mediterranean in pre-classical times, in a period sometimes called early antiquity.<sup>1</sup> As used here, the term connotes the two millennia of human history that we can study on the basis of the rich textual sources produced by the people of the Ancient Near East. My emphasis lies on those textual sources. While I agree with archaeologists that other material remains provide a rich domain to be explored and used by the historian, such remains by themselves do not allow for as detailed a reconstruction as the textual sources do. This is an important second element in the definition of the Mediterranean world as studied by us: the historian's grasp on certain regions depends on the availability of sources and the degree to which they can be analysed. Even for the sixteenth century AD, Braudel had a lot more data to work with from the western side of the Mediterranean than from the eastern. That was to a great extent due to his lack of familiarity with Ottoman sources, which are in fact abundant, a shortcoming he acknowledged candidly. In other times we just lack the evidence to talk sensibly about a certain region, and our focus is forced onto a better documented part of the world we are studying. That is the case in early antiquity when the western Mediterranean was prehistoric, while the eastern Mediterranean was home to a number of well-documented cultures, including those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The latter societies are not always regarded as part of the Mediterranean world, and often their histories are written as if the importance of that sea was only marginal, in the basic sense of that term as referring to a border. I would argue, however, that at times the Ancient Near East was the Mediterranean world, or at least the eastern part of it. I will discuss here the era of Near Eastern history that is often referred to as the Late Bronze Age. As archaeological subdivisions have little relevance in historical terms, I do not like to use that term, however, and prefer the temporal designation of the second half of the second millennium BC, admittedly an awkward mouthful.

<sup>1</sup> I borrow the term from I. M. Diakonoff, who used it as the title of a collection of papers discussing world civilizations until c.1000 BC (*Early Antiquity* (Chicago, 1991)). I employ it as a purely chronological term, outside a Marxist evolutionary model of the development of ancient society.

## 2. THE STATES OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

In the centuries from 1500 to 1100 BC the eastern Mediterranean world, including a large landmass that stretched more than 1200 kilometres inland to the east and south, formed a system of states and cultures that tied the whole region together. One of the consequences of the system's existence was that many of the states simultaneously produced a rich written record. This enables the historian to look at them without the bias of one point of view dominating the entire picture, as is often the case. The first part of this paper will be descriptive, introducing these actors. All of them have their individual histories, which have been studied with great detail and care by scholars of various disciplines. I will move here, arbitrarily, from east to west, north to south, but my order is not important. Afterwards, I will try to explain how they came together as one eastern Mediterranean system. I will focus at first on politics as the organizing force, but I hope it will become clear that the unity provided by the political setting extended into many other aspects of life as well. The political system was only part of a greater process of the formation of a Mediterranean world, one that does not overlap in geographical terms with the worlds discussed elsewhere in this volume (see Map 1).

In the south-west corner of modern-day Iran was located the state of Elam, where the timespan from about 1450 to 1100 BC is identified as the Middle Elamite period in modern scholarship. This was an era during which the state became centralized and powerful enough to get militarily involved in the affairs of its direct neighbors, Babylonia and Assyria. Famous today is the campaign by King Shutruk-Nahhunte who around 1165 raided Babylonia. Because he brought back an enormous amount of booty from all major cities there, most of the famous early Babylonian monuments were excavated in Iran rather than Iraq, such as the stela of Naram-Sin and the law code of Hammurabi. While Elam was only peripheral to the eastern Mediterranean world for a long time, its late military campaigns and involvement in the Mesopotamian region ultimately made it an important actor on the scene.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For the history of Elam, see D. T. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam* (Cambridge, 1999).

Moving west we find Babylonia, which at this time was ruled by its longest-lasting dynasty, that of the Kassites who were in control from 1595 to 1155 BC. This period is often portrayed as one of decline and weakness for the region, but that is a misconception. We find a stable unified state, considered to be equal to the major states of the time, Egypt and Hatti. Internally there was an economic resurgence after a difficult period in the mid-second millennium, and by all accounts culture flourished. Babylonia was not always successful in keeping Assyria and Elam at bay, and it knew its low points, but the Kassite period can be seen as a golden age rather than a dark one.<sup>3</sup>

Its northern neighbour, Assyria, was somewhat of a late comer on the scene. In the early part of the period, up until the mid-fourteenth century, it was a small state centred around the city Assur, which was perhaps not fully independent, but controlled by the Mittani state in northern Syria to be discussed next. But from c.1350 on, through a succession of strong military rulers, Assyria asserted its authority throughout the region: it reduced in power and finally annexed the adjoining part of the Mittani state, which allowed it to compete with the great powers of Babylon and Hatti.<sup>4</sup>

Northern Syria at the beginning of the second half of the second millennium was governed by a state called Mittani. Its history is less known than that of its neighbours because the capital city, known from texts to have been Washukanni, has not yet been found. We are certain, however, that Mittani was the major power of western Asia in the fifteenth and early fourteenth centuries—only Egypt equalled it. Its fortunes, however, were determined by its northern and eastern neighbours, Hatti and Assyria. In their expansion into the Syrian plains the Hittites had to confront Mittani, and successfully reduced its power in the second half of the fourteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Kassite Babylonia remains relatively poorly studied. For a survey, see A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c.3000–330 BC* (London and New York, 1995), 332–48. A recent discussion of many socioeconomic aspects is L. Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge zur Verwaltung und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in der Kassitenzeit, Baghdader Forschungen* 21 (Mainz, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> For surveys of Middle Assyrian history, see A. K. Grayson, 'Mesopotamia, History of (Assyria)', in D. N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, 1992), iv. 737–40, and Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East*, 348–62.

The main beneficiary of this expansion was ultimately Assyria, however, as it managed in the long run to take over all Mittani territory as far west as the Euphrates. By 1250 BC Mittani was no more.<sup>5</sup>

To the north, the central area of Anatolia was the heartland of the Hittite state, called Hatti in contemporary sources. It established control over Anatolia in the early fourteenth century, and extended into northern Syria in the second half of that century. The first opponents in the Syrian theatre were the Mittani, but later the conflict there was with Egypt. Taking advantage of internal Egyptian troubles, the Hittites spread their influence further south with little difficulty. By the time Egypt had gathered itself together and wanted to reassert its interests in western Asia, Hatti was in control of the region as far south as Qadesh. It was near that city in 1274 BC that Ramesses II clashed with the Hittite king Muwatalli, a battle that was lost by the Egyptian king (which did not prevent him from describing it as a major victory in numerous texts and representations). The Hittite focus upon the south left the state exposed on its northern and western borders. The north was the territory of a group called Gasga, seemingly not organized in any kind of state, but a constant military threat.<sup>6</sup>

The western regions of Anatolia present a different picture, although one not easy to draw because of the shortcomings of the documentation. States under an internationally recognized king existed there from early on in this period. The king of Arzawa in south-west Anatolia, for example, was in correspondence with Amenhotep III of Egypt, who sought his daughter's hand in marriage in order to conclude an alliance to put pressure on Hatti. In the latter part of the period an important player on the western scene was the kingdom of Ahhiyawa. The study of this state is complicated by the question of whether or not its name is related to the Achaeans, the Homeric term to designate the Greeks at Troy.<sup>7</sup> If indeed Ahhiyawa and Achaea

<sup>5</sup> See G. Wilhelm, *The Hurrians* (Warminster, 1989) for a history of the Mittani state.

<sup>6</sup> The Hittites have been studied extensively. A recent survey is by T. Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> The question has been vociferously discussed ever since the 1920s with no definite solution in sight. For a short summary, see *ibid.* 59–63.

were the same, we may have evidence that something resembling the Trojan war had taken place in reality: Greek expansion onto the Anatolian coast could have included long-term sieges of the type described by Homer. The question will not be settled on the basis of linguistic evidence, and its solution depends on further archaeological work which can clarify the nature of Mycenaean presence in western Anatolia. On balance, I believe that the connection between the two can be made, and that the Hittites knew of a political entity in the west that can be related to the Mycenaeans of the Greek mainland and the Aegean islands.

The study of the Aegean region is much more restricted because of the limitations of the textual data. Although writing was in use, with the so-called Linear B texts, the content is of little historical value. The tablets have to be regarded as illustrative of a civilization whose main characteristics are revealed through (other) archaeological remains. In the second half of the second millennium, the Aegean developed from a bipolar order, with differing cultural traditions in Crete and on the Greek mainland, to one where the Mycenaean material culture of the mainland was attested throughout the region. It is possible that there was some type of regional political unification of a nature similar to what we see under the Mittani, for instance. In any case, Mycenae was a crucial part of the trade that flourished throughout the eastern Mediterranean, with goods in exchange between Greece, the Near East, and Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

This last state, Egypt, is the best documented of them all at this time. Archaeological and textual data abound, and we can reconstruct elements of political and social history in great detail. It also was the state that steadily remained for the longest time a crucial player on the international scene. New Kingdom Egypt resurrected itself from the chaos of the so-called Hyksos period as early as the sixteenth century, and stayed strong within and outside its borders almost constantly until about 1200. It extended itself far south into Nubia and annexed it. It kept a constant presence in the Syro-Palestinian area, although the greatest expansion there was reached at an early point and

<sup>8</sup> The literature on the Aegean world is enormous, see, for example, O. Dickinson, *The Aegean Bronze Age* (Cambridge, 1994).

Egypt gradually lost territory thereafter. This was the period of the great temple constructions at Luxor and Karnak, of the Valley of the Kings, and of Abu Simbel. In many respects it was one of the greatest periods in Egyptian history.<sup>9</sup>

These were the great states of the region in the second half of the second millennium—not all equally centralized and powerful, but all regional powers. Stuck in the centre of the region was the Syro-Palestinian area, an interstitial zone with several important and well-documented states (for instance, Ugarit on the Syrian coast), but these were all much smaller in size and minor players on the international scene. Their secondary status was maintained by the great powers, because these needed a buffer zone between them. The Syro-Palestinian states had their own rulers, who had to pledge allegiance to the nearby power that was the strongest: Mittani, Hittite, or Egyptian. At home they were kings; in their relations with the regional overlords they were servants. They partook in a system where their proper place was one of obedience to the distant lords, useful in proxy wars and providing tribute on an annual basis.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. POLITICAL EVOLUTION IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE SECOND MILLENNIUM BC

The remarkable aspect of these states' histories is that they developed, flourished, and then declined, more or less at the same time. The simultaneity of the cycles was not pure coincidence. The proximity of the states and the close interactions between them, as attested in numerous sources, force us to look beyond their individual histories to explain the waxing and waning of their fortunes. A lot of ink has flowed over the question of the collapse of the period, primarily for the Aegean, Anatolian, and Syro-Palestinian regions where the role of foreign invaders has been much debated. The development across the region of a shared social and political organization has not received the same attention, however, and deserves to be

<sup>9</sup> The literature on the period is also enormous. For a recent survey, see I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> A good basic survey of many of these states is provided by H. Klengel, *Syria 3000 to 300 B.C. A Handbook of Political History* (Berlin, 1992).

addressed. Ironically a lot has been invested in discovering how the system failed, but not on how it evolved.

In the sixteenth century the entire region had been characterized by political fragmentation: nowhere do we see strong states and as a result the textual documentation is extremely scarce. Only in Egypt do we have a grasp on the situation, but even there our understanding is limited. From the mid-seventeenth century on, the country had been divided into a number of principalities, several of which were considered to be ruled by foreigners, named 'Hyksos' in later Egyptian tradition. Although only one Hyksos dynasty may have had hegemony over the north and a Theban dynasty may have controlled the entire south, it is clear from contemporary and later sources that other petty rulers considered themselves to be kings as well.<sup>11</sup>

This pattern extended everywhere throughout the sixteenth-century eastern Mediterranean world. Competing dynasties ruled small areas. The near-total absence of textual remains indicates that their economy was underdeveloped and their political control weak. The only exception to this may have been in the early Hittite state, where two rulers, Hattusili I and Mursili I, were highly successful militarily and may have unified all of eastern Anatolia. Their ability to roam throughout the entire region, with Mursili reaching Babylon in 1595 BC, shows how weak resistance must have been. The short period of Old Kingdom Hittite strength was abruptly terminated by Mursili's assassination leading to a decline of that state as well. Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Syria-Palestine thereafter saw a sharp reduction of inhabited zones and an increase of semi-nomadic life. Urban centres became fewer in number, islands in a countryside with less permanent settlement.

The situation of political weakness and economic decline was reversed in the late-sixteenth and fifteenth centuries, when a system of territorial states with more or less equivalent powers developed. Many, if not all, of the states involved, attained a size and coherence never known before in their histories. The best-known examples are Egypt, and Babylonia and Assyria in Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamian states became truly territor-

<sup>11</sup> J. Bourriau, 'The Second Intermediate Period (c.1650–1550 BC)', in Shaw (ed.), *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, 185–217.

ial states, ruled from one political centre by dynasties that considered themselves to rule a country, not a city. The territories included several cities and their hinterlands, and had a degree of economic integration never seen before. Ideologically, the idea that the city was at the heart of cultural and political life survived, but the political autonomy and economic autarky of cities had disappeared.

In Egypt the situation had always been different. There, a territorial state had developed already by the early third millennium, and the entire Nile valley from the first cataract to the Mediterranean had been unified from about 3000 BC on. Even in the so-called Intermediate periods, the periods of political fragmentation, the situation was very different from what we see in Mesopotamia: provinces, not cities, detached themselves from the capital city. While these provinces had cities in them, the latter never developed into the crucial centres of political, economic, and ideological organization that they were in Mesopotamia. The New Kingdom was something new, however, both because of its geographical extent and its integration of the conquered regions outside the heartland. Geographically, the early New Kingdom extended far beyond anything reached before or afterwards in Egypt's history. By the reign of Amenhotep III in the first half of the fourteenth century, Egypt controlled an area from northern Syria to central Sudan, and its northern and southern borders were more than 2,000 kilometres apart. Throughout the New Kingdom, Nubia was regarded as a part of the Egyptian heartland, its government assigned to a 'viceroy of Kush.' The grasp on the Asiatic territories, on the other hand, was loose, at first at least. Egyptian policy changed in the nineteenth dynasty, however. By the reign of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC), the geographical extent had decreased in the north, with a much greater level of integration, however. Only Palestine was in Egypt's hands, but the area was more directly controlled than ever before, with an imposition of Egyptian material culture and administration.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> B. M. Bryan, 'Art, Empire, and the End of the Late Bronze Age', in J. Cooper and G. Schwartz (eds.), *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the 21st Century* (Winona Lake, Minn., 1996), 33–79.

In the other states of the region the changes between the early and the late second millennium are more difficult to ascertain because we are less able to determine the political organization in prior times. The cohesion of the Middle Elamite state and the differences with what preceded it are difficult to evaluate, as is the case for the Aegean world. In the latter the attestation of states in Hittite texts (e.g. Arzawa and Ahhiyawa) and the homogeneity of material culture, may indicate a substantive political change from before. Northern Syria under the Mittani and Anatolia under the Hittites, were certainly politically integrated under one central ruler, even if he effected his rule through a system of viceroys and vassals.

The only exception to this general trend toward larger regional political units was the Syro-Palestinian area: here the basic system of small states centred around a single city continued to exist. Numerous examples are known—Jerusalem, Byblos, Damascus, Ugarit, Aleppo, and others. Qualitatively, we see no difference with the situation in the first part of the second millennium, even if the earlier picture is a lot murkier. Perhaps this exception to the rule underscores how fundamental the changes elsewhere were. The Syro-Palestinian region was interstitial between competing territorial states; first Egypt and Mittani, later Egypt and Hatti with Assyria lurking in the background. It acted as a buffer between these states and as a place where they could interact competitively. The region could not be permitted by the great powers to unify and to develop into a territorial state itself, nor was any of those powers able to firmly integrate the region within its territory. The other surrounding great states were strong enough to prevent that from happening. The qualitative difference between themselves and the Syro-Palestinian rulers was acknowledged in their interactions. Only the rulers of the territorial states could regard each other as equals, while those of the Syro-Palestinian states were of a distinctly lower rank. Thus these small states were forced to pledge allegiance to one or another of the neighbouring overlords, switching that allegiance to the stronger power as needed. They continued to exist as separate political entities, distinct from their suzerains in the great states, and they were prevented from uniting with their fellows by those great states.

Can we explain why such a concurrent development of territorial states took place? It would be shortsighted to look at every case individually and to try to find the reasons for the changes in the sociopolitical organization within the histories of each state by itself. The idea that the simultaneous and parallel developments were accidental is in contrast to the truly international character of the subsequent era. If we look at the entire region as a whole, as a system, we can interpret it through an interpretative model called 'Peer Polity Interaction', developed by Colin Renfrew to explain change and interaction in early states,<sup>13</sup> units smaller than the ones we encounter in the second half of the second millennium. He quantified the size of those polities, which he called Early State Modules, as some 1,500 square kilometres in extent with a diameter of about 40 kilometres. The model has been applied to various early states, in the Old World as well as the New World, in prehistory as well as history. The benefit for using it in the context discussed here is that the level of sociopolitical integration of the Early State Modules is irrelevant.<sup>14</sup> The advantage of this model is that it urges us to look beyond the borders of the individual polity in order to explain change, especially when simultaneous increases in social and economic complexity are visible in several polities in the same region. The model focuses on early states because anthropological archaeology has been preoccupied with the development of pristine states, but we should seek to apply it to the study of more complex state societies as well. It is far from unusual in history that similar social and political changes take place in neighbouring regions. For example, the simultaneous growth of nation-states throughout nineteenth-century Europe was surely not coincidental. The concept of peer polity interaction seems thus ideally suited to investigate change in the Eastern Mediterranean in the second half of the second millennium, because it avoids stressing dominance by one centre and does not look at the units involved in isolation.

<sup>13</sup> C. Renfrew, 'Introduction: Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-political Change', in C. Renfrew and J. F. Cherry (eds.), *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-political Change* (Cambridge, 1986), 1–18.

<sup>14</sup> 'Epilogue and prospect', *ibid.* 149–58.

Conceito da arqueologia. 3 tipos principais de interação: 1) competição 2) "entretenimento simbólico" quando sociedades emprestam o sistema simbólico de seus vizinhos. 3) transmissão de inovação.

## 4. SOCIAL STRUCTURE

A set of political and social characteristics was shared by all states of the Eastern Mediterranean in the second half of the second millennium, not coincidentally, but because they formed part of the same structure. These characteristics included the political structure, which as described above involved the development in most regions from city-states to territorial states. The similarity in political organization was paralleled in other areas of life as well. All states in the region, even the Syro-Palestinian ones, were made up of strict hierarchical societies in which a small palatial elite dominated the mass of the population. These elites were resident in urban centres, where their conspicuous consumption clearly distinguished them from the rest of the people. The strict social hierarchy and the great divisions in wealth in these societies are perhaps best illustrated by the building projects of this time. They included the construction of luxurious palaces everywhere, often separating the ruling classes from their subjects, such as in the citadels at Mycenae and Hattusa, the Hittite capital. The building of entirely new capital cities was a logical extension of the practice of providing the elite with its own separate residences, and is attested throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

Akhetaten (El-Amarna) in Egypt is a good example of that practice. This city was gigantic in size, contained several palaces and a temple in honour of the king's personal god Aten, as well as living quarters for the population imported both to build the city and to run the king's household and the state. All the official buildings were decorated with reliefs, frescos, and statuary. There is now little of this city left to admire, but its sheer size and the few representations of parts of it<sup>15</sup> show that its building was a massive project. Started in Akhenaten's fifth year and abandoned soon after his death in his seventeenth year, it must have required a colossal effort to build the city in such a short period. Akhetaten was not an exception in New Kingdom Egypt: Ramesses II built his own capital in Per-

<sup>15</sup> B. J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London, 1989), 272.

Ramesse, little known today but praised in antiquity. In other states we find the same practice of building new capitals: Al-Untash-Napirisha in Elam, Dur-Kurigalzu in Babylonia, and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta in Assyria. The names of these cities all incorporate a specific ruler's name, except for Akhetaten which refers to the king's personal god rather than himself. These were not constructions for the people, but cities entirely built as residences for the king. His ability to construct them, all of them substantial if not gigantic in size, demonstrates the wealth of resources that were available to him. They show a desire to distance the ruler from the people, and reflect the power struggles that went on among the elites. It is likely that in these places an altogether new bureaucracy was created, one of *homines novi* who were fully dependent on the king rather than on familial ties for their social status.

The practice of palace construction and separation from the populace is visible on a different scale in the Syro-Palestinian area. Because of its political dependence on the great powers nearby it was unacceptable for the local rulers there to build strong fortresses, and we see a decline in that respect in comparison to the first half of the second millennium. Yet, they could build themselves extensive palaces, as at Alalakh and Ugarit, for instance. The latter city contained an area with several palaces, the main one of which has been described as one of the largest and most luxurious of the Near East at the time.<sup>16</sup> In such places the dominant powers could secure their control by constructing fortified citadels, as the Hittites did in Emar<sup>17</sup> and Carchemish.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to palaces, temples for the gods favoured by the dynasts were also constructed, and it is clear that the religious elites also benefited from the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few. One has only to think of the temples of Luxor and Karnak. Not only the living elites enjoyed excessive

<sup>16</sup> G. Saadé, *Ougarit. Métropole Cananéenne* (Beirut, 1979), 98–110.

<sup>17</sup> J.-C. Margueron, 'Fondations et refondations au proche-orient au bronze récent', in S. Mazzoni (ed.), *Nuove fondazioni nel vicino oriente antico: realtà e ideologia* (Pisa, 1994), 3–27.

<sup>18</sup> R. Naumann, *Architektur Kleinasiens von ihren Anfängen bis zum Ende der hethitischen Zeit*, 2nd edn. (Tübingen, 1971), 330–2.

wealth, but in certain cultures the dead were lavishly provided with grave goods when buried. Egypt is the best-known example of this practice—remember that Tutankhamun's tomb was merely for a minor ruler—but we also see it in the Aegean world and the Levant. The goods recovered in the shaft tombs at Mycenae and the architecture of the later tholoi-tombs all over the Greek mainland show that some individuals commanded great wealth at the expense of the general population. The expenditures reserved for the elites were staggering.

The textual documentation shows the existence of a dual social hierarchy, distinguishing palace dependents from the population in village communities.<sup>19</sup> The palace dependents were not free; they did not own their own land, but if we take movable wealth as an indicator of social status, they were often much better off than the free people. It is in the palace sector, which incorporated temple personnel as well, that we see the greatest degree of social stratification. On the bottom of the hierarchy were serfs working the agricultural estates. Status depended on the services one provided for the palace: the more specialized skills provided a higher status. Thus specialist craftsmen, scribes, cult personnel, and administrators all had their rank and order. For a long time, the military elites topped the hierarchy; specialist charioteers in these societies were highly prized and well-rewarded for their services. In the Syro-Palestinian area they were designated with the term *mar-jannu* which later became the term for an elite social status in certain societies.<sup>20</sup> The rewards given to palace dependents were issued in rations for the lower levels, payments and the usufruct of fields for the higher ones. As service was expected in return, the use of these fields was granted on an individual basis, not to families; but later in the period military elites tried to make the tenancies heritable and to pay for them in silver rather than services.

<sup>19</sup> I. M. Diakonoff, 'The Structure of Near Eastern Society before the Middle of the 2nd millennium B.C.', *Oikumene* 3 (1982), 7-100; M. Liverani, 'Ras Shamra. Histoire', *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, (Paris, 1979), ix. 1333-42.

<sup>20</sup> G. Wilhelm, 'Marijannu', *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 7 (Berlin and New York, 1987-90), 419-21.

The free people were not entirely outside government control, as they were obliged to pay taxes or provide corvée labour when requested. But they owned their fields, often as communities rather than as individuals, where they scratched a poor living from the soil. The palace provided them with a certain support: in the irrigation societies of Mesopotamia and Egypt they maintained the canal systems. The extent of the free sectors of the various societies is hard to establish and must have varied from state to state. In terms of social stratification its members together with the agricultural palace serfs were at the bottom, seeing much of produce of their labour usurped by those higher up.

It is not my contention that the second half of the second millennium was the only period in ancient Mediterranean history in which we find such uneven distributions of wealth and strict social stratification. That is a characteristic of most societies, ancient, pre-modern and modern. Yet it is unusual that the situation was so similar in numerous places over a large geographical area. Earlier in the history of the region we see such circumstances in isolated places, primarily Egypt and Babylonia. Later there were single centres that commanded the resources of the entire region: the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires. This was very different from a situation in which neighbouring states were all organized along the same hierarchical lines.

##### 5. WAR AND DIPLOMACY

The conjunction of cultural development in these societies is also visible in their shared ideologies. Certainly there were substantial differences between these peoples' perception of the world, but they shared visions about proper behaviour in social interaction and warfare, about equality and superiority in diplomacy, about the definitions of the civilized and the uncivilized. The participants in the system were aware that they had to adhere to certain standards of conduct in order to fit in. The rulers of the great states saw themselves as peers, and addressed each other as brothers. The rulers of smaller states, those of the Syro-Palestinian area, were inferior, and had to address the great kings as 'lord'. It was probably easy to determine where

one belonged in this respect. The king of Ugarit, for instance, was a vassal of the Hittite one, and could not expect to be regarded as a great king. The 'club of the great powers'<sup>21</sup> was select and resistant to change, even when the political reality dictated it: when Assyria tried to translate its military successes into diplomatic equality with Babylonia, Hatti, and Egypt, it was rudely rejected at first until the others realized the legitimacy of its claims.<sup>22</sup>

The interaction between these states was highly competitive, even if they knew that they had to live alongside one another. Competition is a normal aspect of peer polity interaction and can express itself in several ways.<sup>23</sup> The most antagonistic, warfare, was common throughout the region, involving every state. One cannot say that this was a peaceful period, yet also not one that was militarily dominated by one state. Indeed, although we can judge with hindsight that the Hittites seem to have been more successful than the Egyptians in their contest over the Syro-Palestinian area, we cannot proclaim them or any other state at the time to have been the controlling military power. This is a very different situation from that in the first millennium, when we see the Assyrians, for example, dominating the entire region without any true competitors.

Part of the new state expenditures was connected to the introduction of chariotry in all armies. This technological innovation appeared early in the period: we know that Egypt had a fully developed chariotry by the reign of Amenhotep III. Chariotry was something that bound the states of the Eastern Mediterranean together, as it was found in every one of them.<sup>24</sup> In several of the states (Ugarit and Alalakh) the charioteers became

<sup>21</sup> H. Tadmor, 'The Decline of Empires in Western Asia ca. 1200 B.C.E.', in F. M. Cross (ed.), *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900-1975)* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 3.

<sup>22</sup> The system has been studied extensively. For a recent analysis, see M. Liverani, *International Relations in the Ancient Near East, 1600-1100 BC* (New York, 2001). The case of Assyria is discussed there on pages 41-2.

<sup>23</sup> Renfrew, 'Introduction', 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> C. Zaccagnini, 'Pferde und Streitwagen in Nuzi, Bemerkungen zur Technologie', *Jahresbericht des Instituts für Vorgeschichte der Universität Frankfurt a. M.* (1977), 28.

the military and political upper class, although they later turned to agrarian interests.<sup>25</sup> While relatively few chariots were used (perhaps only one per one hundred infantry men), they were expensive. Beside the material to build the chariots,<sup>26</sup> each one required two horses for pulling and one or two more reserve animals. In certain places, such as Egypt, horses were rare and had to be imported. Hence the gift of horses featured prominently in the Amarna letters.<sup>27</sup> Other equipment needed to be produced constantly. Chariot horses and some soldiers wore expensive bronze scale armour,<sup>28</sup> although in general protective gear seems to have been limited. In several administrative texts from Nuzi thousands of arrows are mentioned! The procurement of the wood or reed for the shafts, the casting of the copper or bronze for the heads, and the manufacture all must have required a central organization. We have an extensive textual record from Nuzi dealing with the manufacture of weapons, chariots, armour, bows and arrows, etc., and it is thus not far-fetched to claim that a large part of the palace economy in a small state like Arrapkha was devoted to military supply.<sup>29</sup>

Armies also required a lot of manpower. We are not in a position to estimate the sizes of the armies involved in the battles and campaigns we study, as references to numbers of enemies in royal victory statements were probably exaggerated. The Egyptians claimed, for example, that Muwatalli mounted an army of some 47,500 men against Ramesses II in the battle of Qadesh,<sup>30</sup> but we cannot confirm the accuracy of that claim. Yet, for certain states, such as Assyria with a small population in the heartland, the annual levy of troops must have been a heavy imposition. Part of the pressure on the native populations was removed by the use of mercenaries, a habit that seems to have

<sup>25</sup> Wilhelm, *The Hurrians*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Zaccagnini, 'Pferde und Streitwagen', 28-31.

<sup>27</sup> D. O. Edzard, 'Die Beziehungen Babyloniens und Ägyptens in der mittelbabylonischen Zeit und das Gold', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 3 (1960), 37-55.

<sup>28</sup> Zaccagnini, 'Pferde und Streitwagen', 32-4.

<sup>29</sup> S. Dalley, 'Ancient Mesopotamian Military Organization', in J. M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1995), 417.

<sup>30</sup> R. H. Beal, 'Hittite Military Organization', in Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations*, 547.

become common in the later part of the period. At the battle of Qadesh, for instance, mercenaries were used by both the Hittites and the Egyptians, many of them drawn from the very populations that later contributed to the fall of these states, the Sea Peoples and the Libyans. That these groups could become powerful elements in the societies that recruited them is demonstrated by the case of Egypt, where the 'Chieftains of the Ma', i.e. the Libyan mercenaries, grabbed control over certain territories after the end of the New Kingdom.<sup>31</sup>

Even if we are unable then to quantify the expenditures involved in the military activities of the states of the region, we can suggest that they were not minor and that warfare probably necessitated a concerted economic effort. That focus by itself was partly responsible for the maintenance of the international system of the eastern Mediterranean area, as some of the resources required, ironically perhaps, could only be obtained abroad. Copper and tin had to be imported by many in order to make the bronze weaponry needed by a competitive army, horses were an item of exchange between the kings. Thus warfare not only brought states together in a competitive way, but also forced them to trade.

#### 6. CULTURAL AND MERCANTILE INTERACTIONS

Not all competition between the states of the region was of a military nature, however. Among peer polity interactions Renfrew included what he called competitive emulation, the urge to display greater wealth and power, to outdo the others in exhibiting the fashions of the time. Archaeologists and art historians have spent a lot of energy in tracing how styles of pottery decoration, wall paintings, and so on were passed on from one culture to another in the region of the eastern Mediterranean. They speak of an 'International Style' that merges indigenous and foreign elements in its artistic expression.<sup>32</sup> The

<sup>31</sup> D. O'Connor, 'New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, 1552-664 BC', in B. F. Trigger *et al.*, *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge, 1983), 238-9.

<sup>32</sup> M. H. Feldman, 'Luxurious Forms: Redefining a Mediterranean "International Style"', 1400-1200 B.C.E., *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002), 6-29.

interactions between the Aegean and Syria-Palestine and Egypt have especially drawn a lot of attention.<sup>33</sup> For example, wall paintings found at Tell Kabri in Palestine and Tell el-Daba'a in the Egyptian delta shared decorative motives and styles with those excavated in Crete. The focus of attention has been in trying to identify the direction of the borrowing, the source of the style, but it is more important here to realize that the elites of the region shared a lifestyle transcending political borders which distinguished them probably more from their own countrymen than from their counterparts elsewhere. These cultural borrowings were certainly not limited to materials we can recognize in the archaeological record today, but must have included ephemeral things such as clothing, foods, perfumes, drugs, etc.<sup>34</sup>

It may even be possible to include language in this. Just as the European elites in the eighteenth century AD conversed in French, could the eastern Mediterranean ones of the fourteenth century BC not have shown off their knowledge of the Akkadian language? The palace scribes used that language for international correspondence with various levels of competence, but are we not looking at their skill in a too purely utilitarian way? Several examples of Akkadian literature were found amongst the tablets excavated at Hattusa, Emar, Ugarit, and Akhetaten. A fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh was picked up at Megiddo in Palestine, and it seems certain that the numerous palaces of the region can only continue to yield further evidence that the Akkadian language was not used just for purely practical purposes. We cannot determine who enjoyed reading or listening to these texts; yet their presence suggests that a certain class in these societies thought it useful to study a foreign language and its literature.

<sup>33</sup> For example, H. J. Kantor, 'The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium B.C.', *American Journal of Archaeology* 51 (1947), 1-103.

<sup>34</sup> A. and S. Sherratt, 'From Luxuries to Commodities: the Nature of Mediterranean Bronze Age Trading Systems', in N. H. Gale (ed.), *Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean* (Jansered, 1991), 351-86. For opium trade from Cyprus to the Levant, see R. S. Merrillies and J. Evans, 'Highs and Lows in the Holy Land: Opium in Biblical Times', *Eretz Israel* 20 (1989), 148-54.

What exactly constituted a fashionable lifestyle must have changed over time and place. It was probably made up by a mixture of local traditions and influences from abroad. The elites of the area must have seen in the 'International Style' a way in which to distinguish themselves from those they considered to be lower classes. We can easily imagine, however, that they also tried to impress the emissaries and visitors of other states by showing off their lifestyle. The gigantic size of many of the buildings constructed at this time, most notably in Egypt but certainly elsewhere as well, must not only have been used to impress the local populations, but foreign visitors as well.

In addition to the competitive character of the interactions between these states, they were also tied together by a great **exchange of goods**. This has been studied extensively, especially with respect to the Aegean world whose pottery, for instance, can be found all over the Syro-Palestinian coastal area and in Egypt. Similarly, Egyptian and western Asiatic material is found in the Aegean.<sup>35</sup> The exchange of goods took place on several levels in the societies. Kings traded high-value prestige items, such as ivory, gold, and hard woods. They shared the ideology that they did not acquire such items by cheap marketeering, but that they were given to them by colleagues to whom they would return the favour by giving something else valuable. Parallel to this system existed a more basic one in which goods were traded by merchants travelling along the coast or through the countryside. **The sea trade is well-attested archaeologically, including by two shipwrecks found off the southern coast of Turkey. Merchants circulated in the eastern half of the Mediterranean in an anticlockwise direction, following the coast. They picked up goods wherever they came ashore along the way, which they acquired by trading-in some of their cargo.**

The latter was so eclectic that one cannot assign a country of origin to the merchants. The shipwreck of Uluburun dating to the late fourteenth century, for example, had as its main cargo ten tons of Cypriot copper and one ton of tin of unknown origin, both poured into easily transportable ingots. The ship also

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, E. H. Cline, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea. International Trade and the Late Bronze Age Aegean* (Oxford, 1994).

contained logs of ebony, which the Egyptians must have obtained in tropical Africa, and cedar logs from Lebanon. Ivory tusks and hippopotamus teeth also came from Egypt, while murex shells, prized for their dye, could have been obtained in various locations in north Africa and the Syrian and Lebanese coast. In addition to these materials the ship held manufactured goods, such as Canaanite jewelry, Cypriot pottery, beads of gold, faience, agate, glass, and so on, all from different sources. There was even a jeweller's hoard on board with scraps of gold, silver, and electrum, a scarab with the name of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti, and cylinder seals from Babylonia, Assyria, and Syria.<sup>36</sup>

#### 7. AN EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SYSTEM

The extent of the interactions and the shared culture we observe in the region make the eastern Mediterranean of the second half of the second millennium an ideal place for application of the peer polity interaction model. This allows us to see the simultaneous changes in the various states as a result of processes throughout the region. We need not look for a place where developments happened first, nor need we see the diffusion of ideas as the motor behind change. **The political culture of the eastern Mediterranean did not originate in one state alone, and was not adapted by others later; it grew up because of the interchange of influences from all participants.** We can obviously locate the source of certain elements, such as that the Akkadian language and literature in use derived from Babylonia. But this is not really important. An international system had developed through the input of many who closely interacted with one another. That system was not static once it had been developed, and changed through and because of the actions and developments of individual states. The general characteristics that determined its nature lasted for at least 200 years. The competitive coexistence of this set of equivalent states makes this period unique in ancient history.

<sup>36</sup> C. Pulak and G. F. Bass, 'Uluburun', in E. Meyers (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (New York and Oxford, 1997), v. 266-8.

My argument here is that we can see a world that is united in many respects. It can be called a Mediterranean system, because this sea acted as one of the connecting arteries in it. Parallel to maritime connections existed networks of movement by river and overland routes, and it is thus senseless to make a division between the regions abutting the sea and those further inland. The region of the Mediterranean extended far to its east. At the same time, this Mediterranean world did not include the regions west of the Greek mainland. Contacts with the western Mediterranean existed during this period, but it was peripheral to the system I have described. Archaeologically, we can determine that the Mycenaeans visited mineral rich regions in the west. But this was a periphery, one that did not participate in the system as an equal partner, and one that cannot be studied by the historian on equal terms as there are no sources beyond the archaeological ones which are often silent on questions we need to ask.

Despite the importance of the Mediterranean Sea as an artery of contact between these states as we observe it today, the inhabitants of the region did not themselves acknowledge this. On the contrary, they saw the sea as a hostile force, a place of chaos and danger. That travel by boat took place regularly is clear from the archaeological record, including the shipwrecks, and textual material attests to it, including at the level of royal correspondence. Egyptian ships seem to have been considered superior—or at least Egyptologists tend to think so<sup>37</sup>—and a letter, most likely from Ramesses II to the Hittite Hattusili III, discusses the sending of such ships to function as models for Hittite carpenters. Ramesses states:

[Look, I did send you] one ship, and a second [one I will send you next year]. Your [carpenters] should draw a plan [on the basis of the ships that I send you]. Let them make a plan [and let them imitate the ship, and my brother] will make the fixtures (?) [artfully. You should tar the boat on the inside and the outside] with pitch [so that no water will] seep in [and cause the ship to sink] in the midst of the sea!<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> e.g., T. Säve-Söderbergh, *The Navy of the Eighteenth Dynasty* (Uppsala, 1946).

<sup>38</sup> E. Edel, *Die ägyptisch-hethitische Korrespondenz aus Boghazköi in babylonischer und hethitischer Sprache* (Opladen, 1994), 186–7, no. 79. The passages in square brackets are restored in the broken text.

The textual material from the Levantine coast, especially the city of Ugarit, has a substantial number of references to seafaring, and some have even suggested that there was a Canaanite ‘thalassocracy’ in the second half of the second millennium.<sup>39</sup> People from all states along the Mediterranean shore travelled the seas, however. An eleventh-century tale from Egypt<sup>40</sup> describes the voyage of Wen-Amun, a priest of Amun, to Byblos in order to obtain timber. As must have been common practice for centuries, he took passage on a Syrian boat, and there is no indication that this was regarded as unusual. The tale clearly acknowledges the dangers involved in this travel, however, and seems to show the sea as a world with laws of its own. First, Wen-Amun was robbed of the goods he brought with him by one of the crew members in the Philistine harbor of Dor. His demand to the local ruler for restitution was rejected, so he stole it from yet another ship. Later in the story, he was seized by people from Cyprus and barely escaped with his life. Piracy is mentioned in several letters of the second millennium as well, so it was a real danger. On the other hand, we have to keep in mind that people travelling overland were also reported as being attacked, so the dangers may have evened out.<sup>41</sup>

The sea was dangerous, however, and a force that could not be easily controlled. It is a recurrent motif in the literatures of the ancient Near East that chaos was personified by the sea. The so-called Babylonian creation myth describes how the god Marduk brought order to the universe by defeating the sea-goddess Tiamat. In the literature of the Syrian coastal city Ugarit the god Ba'al likewise defeated Yam, ‘the Sea’, who sometimes is replaced by the god Mot, ‘Death’. This topic of Canaanite literature survived into the first millennium Hebrew Bible, where Yahweh replaced Ba'al.<sup>42</sup> There was a distinct fear

<sup>39</sup> J. M. Sasson, ‘Canaanite Maritime Involvement in the Second Millennium B.C.’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 86 (1966), 126–38.

<sup>40</sup> An English translation can be found in M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley, 1976), ii, 224–30.

<sup>41</sup> A. Altman, ‘Trade between the Aegean and the Levant in the Late Bronze Age: Some Neglected Questions’, in M. Heltzer and E. Lipinski (eds.), *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean (c.1500–1000 B.C.)* (Louvain, 1988), 229–37.

<sup>42</sup> For a convenient recent survey of Near Eastern mythological material where the sea appears as a danger and the scholarly literature, see A. Catastini,

of the sea, which is understandable as the eastern Mediterranean was indeed dangerous to sail. Yet the sea was crucial for the contacts the people at its shores maintained. Such a paradoxical attitude was not unique in antiquity: while the Romans called the Mediterranean *mare nostrum*, they did have a worldview focused on the land and feared the sea.<sup>43</sup> One can rely on the sea without liking it.

The historical situation I described changed drastically by the first millennium, after the so-called Dark Age when we are truly at a loss about most of what took place. From a Near Eastern point of view the Mediterranean became a distant world. The sea was a border that could only be crossed by specialist people living on its coast, the Phoenicians. The Near Eastern states, at first Assyria, then Babylonia and Persia, were landlocked powers, without true equals as neighbours. The Mediterranean Sea was no longer a unifying force, connecting the regions at its eastern shores. The Mediterranean world of the first millennium BC had a much more western orientation and the lands to its east were part of another world. The changes took place due to political, economic, cultural, and technological factors. They were caused by humans, not by nature, and the human as a historical agent has to remain in the centre of our Mediterranean history.

<sup>43</sup> 'Il mostro delle acque: reutilizzazioni bibliche della funzione di un mito', *Mediterraneo Antico: Economie, Società, Culture* 4 (2001), 71–89.

<sup>43</sup> O. A. W. Dilke, 'Graeco-Roman Perception of the Mediterranean', in M. Galley and L. Ladjimi Sebai (eds.), *L'Homme méditerranéen et la mer* (Tunis, 1985), 53–9.

## Ritual Dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean: Case Studies in Ancient Greece and Asia Minor

*Angelos Chaniotis*

### 1. MEDITERRANEAN RITUALS<sup>1</sup>

One of the many monuments the Athenians proudly showed their youth and the visitors to their city was the ship with which Theseus was believed to have sailed to Crete. In the course of the centuries the ship's wooden parts rotted, and the Athenians had to replace them, providing ancient philosophers with an unsolved puzzle: did Theseus' ship remain the same even though its rotten components were continually being replaced?<sup>2</sup> I cannot help thinking about this puzzle when I am confronted with diachronic studies on 'the' Mediterranean. Can the Mediterranean be a somehow distinctive object of historical and cultural study, given the continual change of its living (and therefore, ephemeral) components (human populations and their cultures, animals, and plants)? Or is the Mediterranean as a historical and cultural entity just a construct of the collective imagination of scholars who contribute to journals, books, or conferences that have the name 'Mediterranean' in their title?

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed here stem from the project 'Ritual and Communication in the Greek cities and in Rome', which is part of the interdisciplinary projects 'Ritualdynamik in traditionellen und modernen Gesellschaften' funded by the Ministry of Science of Baden-Württemberg (1999–2000) and 'Ritualdynamik: Soziokulturelle Prozesse in historischer und kulturvergleichender Perspektive' funded by the German Research Council (2002–5); references to my own preliminary studies on relevant subjects are, unfortunately, unavoidable. I have profited greatly from theoretical discussions with my colleagues in this project.

<sup>2</sup> Plu. *Theseus* 23.