Regional Foundations for Internationalism in the Ancient Near East: The Case of Canaan

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Abstract

In the early 15th through 13th centuries BCE, the world of the Near East, from the Mediterranean to modern day Iran, was linked together in what historians today call the First International Age. Correspondence from that period found at El Amarna in Egypt and other sites in Mesopotamia and Anatolia details the diplomatic and economic exchanges between the "Great Powers" of the time (Babylon, Assyria, Mittani, Hatti, and Egypt), and contains letters from the Egyptian vassal kingdoms in the Levant, known as Canaan.

The complex diplomatic interchanges and active economic trade during this period were possible because of the status of Canaan as a series of semi-autonomous vassal states under the Egyptian empire. Canaan acted as the economic center for the entire region, linking the goods and kingdoms of southwest Asia, Africa, and southeastern Europe into a single trading system. Though under the nominal control of Egypt, Canaan served as neutral territory for all the powers, enabling complex political and diplomatic interchange throughout the region.

This paper explores the conditions within Canaan that allowed this system of exchange to flourish, and will show that a number of military, political, and cultural factors in Canaan, which were cultivated by the Egyptians, allowed the region to act as an international territory facilitating trade and political interaction between the Great Powers.

In the early 15th through 13th centuries BCE, the world of the Near East, from the Mediterranean to modern day Iran, was linked together in what historians today call the First International Age. [1] Correspondence from that period found at El Amarna in Egypt and other sites in Mesopotamia and Anatolia details the diplomatic and economic exchanges between the "Great Powers" of the time (Babylon, Assyria, Mittani, Hatti, and Egypt), as well as containing letters from the Egyptian vassal kingdoms in the Levant, known as Canaan.

In terms of world history, the Amarna Age constitutes the first significant international society. Even more significant, the Amarna Age presents a vastly different model for international studies than those we are more familiar with, namely the world of Christian Europe, its periods of colonization, and its evolution into our international society today. Additionally, the Amarna Age established a foundation from which the empires of the Iron Age and Classical Period emerged; it set the stage for the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic empires that would emerge in the following centuries, as well as establishing the Levant as a center of trade that would later be exploited by the Phoenician trading empire. As the Amarna Age forms the basis for developments in the Near East during the late Bronze Age and Iron Age, this paper seeks to determine the foundations of the Amarna Age. Rather than attempting to analyze the Amarna Age or expand upon previous analysis, I seek to understand how and why such an international system could come about in the first place.

The topic of Late Bronze Age diplomacy first garnered attention in 1887 CE with the discovery of the royal archive at El-Amarna, Egypt, the former site of the city of Akhetaten during the reign of Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV) and briefly under Smenkhkare and Tutankhamen. These archives were later complemented by the discovery of archives from the same period in Boghazköy, Turkey, site of the Hittite capital of Hattusas, in 1906-07, and from the Syrian town of Ugarit in 1951-57. Additional records were found at the ancient site of Mari in modern day Iraq in 1933-39, referring to a similar period of international relations in the 18th through 17th centuries BCE known as the "Mari Age", and at the ancient site of Ebla in 1975, dating back as far as the 24th century BCE. Thus, the Amarna records document not a sudden, grand development of international diplomacy in the Near East, but rather the climax of a long tradition of diplomatic contact within the region.

What distinguished Amarna among these other diplomatic "Ages" was the scope and complexity involved in the relations between powers. The Amarna correspondence contains letters from kingdoms throughout the Near East, from Cypress and Greece to the Kassite kingdom of Babylon and its vassals in Elam. Each of these powers engaged in political and military alliances, diplomatic marriages and economic trade, as well as in various systems of vassalage and suzerainty, all utilizing a specific diplomatic language and protocol that was universally recognized throughout the region. The entire system

[1] I am indebted to Dr. Steven Garfinkle of Western Washington University for his help in writing the original paper as well as in revising the version that was presented May 20th, 2006, at the UC World History Workshop, and for introducing me to the topic of the Amarna Age in the first place. Special thanks to Dr. Ronald Mellor, Dr. Claudia Rapp, Dr. David Phillips, and Dr. Aaron Burke of UCLA for their advice and critiques of the paper.

was maintained by and for the benefit of an elite group of kingdoms, known as the Great Powers, which consisted of Egypt, Babylon, Hatti, Mittani, and Assyria, leading to what can be termed the first international "society".

> Martin Wight, in his work *Systems of States*, describes an international society as a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, [that] form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.[2]

This definition expands on the theoretical framework of an international system, in which "a set of states interacts in such a way that each of them has to take into account the capabilities and possible actions of at least one of the others."[3] Wight makes a further distinction in stating that a system needs only basic interaction, whereas a society requires cultural interaction and exchange between the players.[4]

Thus, the question is: does the Amarna Age fit this description? Clearly, several international systems emerged within Mesopotamia and the greater Near East prior to the Amarna Age, including but not limited to the Ebla Age and Mari Age. Relations between the respective Great Powers were expressed within each correspondence in terms of familial relationships: in the formulaic greeting between the Great Powers, the king of each nation is referred to as "brother", and the letters contain exhortations for the general well-being of the household. The holdings of each kingdom were described as part of the extended household of each ruler, complete with domestic metaphors, while references to a master-slave relationship between the Great Powers and their vassals were common.[5] The familial terms themselves were both real and metaphorical, since the royal families of the Great Powers intermarried, thus forming political, economic, and cultural contacts between the powers. One letter from Kadashman Enlil in the Amarna collection implies that intermarriage between the royal households was a requirement of diplomatic exchange; the metaphorical relationship of brotherhood between the Great Powers was thus enforced by the reality of intermarriage between the powers.[6] The Amarna letters themselves also refer to the exchange of gods and religious figures between the Great Powers for the well being of all members of the royal households.[7]

The term "nation" is not well suited for describing the states that existed at the end of the Bronze Age. For each of the Great Powers, the existence of the state was

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[2] M. Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press. 1977), 33, quoted in Rodolfo Ragionieri, "The Amarna Age: An International Society in the Making," in *Amarna Diplomacy - The beginnings of international relations,* Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2000), 43.
[3] Ragioneri, 43.
[4] Wight, 25, in Ragioneri, 43.
[5] Ragionieri, 47.
[6] William Moran, ed. and trans., *The Amarna Letters* (Johns Hopkins University, 2002), EA 3. [Subsequent citations will give the EA number only].
[7] EA, 11; EA, 31; EA 23.

focused upon a single individual, the king; consequently, the people, territory, and resources of each of these kingdoms came to be described as an extension of the household of the king. Each kingdom possessed a hierarchical structure, with authority figures existing at various levels as equals (or "brothers"), and the king functioning at the top of this structure as the "head of household", or *paterfamilias*. International relations thus took the form of personal correspondence between the *paterfamiliae* of the kingdoms. No power had any more authority within such a system than any other, and all were expected to abide by the protocols and rules of interaction. This in turn was mediated by the domestic image of the ruler in question. At home, the Egyptian pharaoh held unquestionable authority, as expressed in the language of fatherhood; internationally, he was only one among a group of equals, or "brothers", and as such he was expected to abide by a set of established standards and was subject to rebuke from the other powers for failing to abide by these standards.[8] Yet, despite the different role and position the pharaoh held in the international and domestic affairs, the two spheres lacked any clear demarcation. If anything, the Amarna correspondence reveals the difficulties that the Great Kings experienced in reconciling their position as master in their own territory and equal among the other powers.

The international system thus created a situation where each of the Great Kings was forced to play a role that was inherently contradictory. While simultaneously presenting themselves as masters (and in the case of the pharaoh, at least partially divine) and without equal domestically, the kings were forced to acknowledge their equality with the other Great Powers, as well as their dependence upon the other Powers for goods. Such a relationship is the topic of a letter from Burna-buriash II, king of Babylon, to Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV):

> And, as I am told, in my brother's country everything is available, and my brother needs absolutely nothing: also in my country everything is available and I myself need absolutely nothing…. Only, four (pounds) of beautiful lapis lazuli have I sent to my brother as a gift, and also five teams of horses. When the times are good, I will send with my future messengers many beautiful gifts, and anything that my brother wishes, he can write….My brother should send me much gold, that I need for my work. But the gold that my brother sends me, do not leave it to some official. Let the eyes of my brother inspect it, and let my brother seal it and send it! Because as far as the previous gold is concerned, which my brother did not inspect personally, but which was sealed and sent by an official of my brother, of the 40 (pounds) which I put in the furnace, there was barely anything of value left.[9]

The letter begins with an acknowledgement of brotherhood and equality; each king is supreme in his own land, and neither king depends upon the other. Yet the end is an implicit acknowledgement of the Babylonian dependence upon the Egyptians for gold, as well as what can be interpreted as a veiled threat against the Egyptians, who depend upon

[8] EA 1; EA 3.
[9] EA 7.

the Babylonians for lapis lazuli (from their vassals in Elam). The role of the kings was one of both master and dependent. Yet there was no concept of a "dual role" for the king that differentiated between actions domestically and internationally. Even while Burna-buriash implies that the kings need one another to supply goods, he explicitly acknowledges each kings' unquestionable domestic authority. No distinction is made in the letter between the king's superiority domestically and equality with and dependence on the other Powers internationally; both roles are acknowledged simultaneously.

Carlo Zaccagnini describes such a relationship as the "interdependence of the Great Powers", and it is in this respect that the Amarna Age can be considered not just an international system, but as an international society. As Wight suggests, the distinction between an international system and international society lies largely in the degree of interaction and in the motives of the actors. A system exists when a series of states interact and are forced to take into account the capabilities of the others; a society exists when these same players interact and share in a common set of rules, beliefs, and institutions. The Amarna correspondence makes explicit the presence of a defined set of rules of interaction.[10] The results, interdependence for certain goods, allowed the kings to engage in extensive building programs that served to legitimate their rule to their domestic subjects. The Great Powers thus became dependent upon the continuation of the international system and the rules and institutions that it entailed in order to rule effectively at home.

It must be noted that even among international relations theorists, there is no fundamental consensus about the formation or existence of international societies. Alan James, in a 1993 article titled "System or Society," questions the very distinction: "Interaction requires both rules and communication, and reflects some common interests."[11] James does argue, however, that the term "society" is applicable to certain international systems during certain historical periods, such as Christian Europe or the Warring States period of Chinese history. Rodolfo Ragionieri deals specifically with the Amarna Age, arguing that at the very least the Amarna Age was a potential international society:

> International society in the Amarna Age was not yet fully developed: general principles of interaction seem to have been agreed, but actors were still adjusting to each other. Even if preferences are considered to be imposed from without, in the Amarna Age the players were for the first time interacting in an environment that went well beyond their familiar domestic milieu.[12]

In the end, whether or not one classifies the Amarna Age as an international system or society, it is important to note that the Amarna Age is characteristically different from any earlier international systems because it represented the first international system where multiple players from different cultural backgrounds fully entangled themselves economically, culturally, and politically, stimulating the emergence of an international

[10] EA 1; EA 2; EA 4; EA 7; EA 9; EA 28; EA 29.
[11] James, Allen, "System or Society," *Review of International Studies* 13, 3 (1993), 275.
[12] Ragionieri, 45.

culture within the Near East and bringing the region into a level of contact that would not be seen again until the rise of the Iron Age empires.

The model of an international society as presented by Wright and the English school of international relations theory does highlight a significant difference in levels of interaction between states, especially in the ancient world. Systems of trade in the ancient Near East, for example between ancient Cyprus and the Mesopotamian city-states, were vastly different from the complex interactions that that occurred during the Amarna Age, which resemble the interstate interactions between the Hellenistic empires, or among the city-states of Greece and Asia Minor. Yet, in the latter examples, the players within these international systems all operated within a similar, if not wholly identical, social and material culture; no such common base existed for the kingdoms of the Amarna Age. Instead, the Amarna Age consisted of a number of states without a common cultural identity or common material culture, interacting over an extended distance and engaging in economic and cultural trade, as well as creating a unique political culture within the region. What enabled this early and distinctive development in the absence of a common culture?

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The complex diplomatic interchange and economic trade during this period was made possible because of the status of Canaan as a collection of semi-autonomous vassal states under the Egyptian empire. Canaan acted as the trade center for the entire region, linking the goods and kingdoms of southwest Asia, Africa, and southeastern Europe into a single trading system. As such, Canaan drew the kingdoms of the Near East into the close diplomatic and economic contact that defined the First International Age. Canaan was able to carry out this function for three reasons. First, the location of Canaan between several centers of civilization allowed it to be exposed to and to incorporate aspects of its neighbors' culture. In essence, Canaan itself was a cultural melting pot, which allowed merchants from each of the Great Powers to interact with the Canaanites with a greater cultural understanding than was possible directly between powers. Second, its domination by Egypt served to stabilize the internal politics of the region. Third, while the competing Great Powers each had claims on Canaan, Egypt's relatively "hands off" approach to its rule of Canaan allowed the other Powers to access the region without turning the zone into an area of competition, economic or military, between the powers.

Early society in Canaan shows clear signs of being influenced by both Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations. Early Canaanite pottery was a mix of Egyptian and Mesopotamian styles.[13] Later pottery styles that are native to Canaan alone retain many of these early foreign influences. Early urbanization in Canaan shows a clear influence from Sumer. City fortifications and the layout of planned cities can be traced almost directly from Sumerian cities.[14] Furthermore, local religious practices, structures,

[13] Ruth Amiran, "The Beginnings of Urbanization in Canaan," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the 20th Century*, ed. James A. Saunders (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc. 1970) 86-87, 89.
[14] Amiran, 95.

and goods show derivation from contemporary Sumerian civilizations.[15] Egypt had compelling trade interests in Canaan dating back to the 28th century BCE.[16] An extensive trading network extended up from Canaan into the city of Mari during the Assyrian empire of Shamshi-Adad. This network continued into the Old Babylonian kingdom of Hammurabi.[17] Northern Canaan, centered around the city-states of Byblos, Aleppo, and Ugarit, was rich in natural resources and produced extensive grain surpluses every year. Beyond grain, the region exported wine, salt, olive oil, gold, silver and timber; it also processed and dyed linen and wool cloth throughout the region.[18]

Thus, even before the First International Age Canaan played a prominent role in trade within the region. Because of its importance to all of the major kingdoms at the time, Canaan became a crossroads where cultural influences intersected and interacted. Nevertheless, Canaan also faced major internal problems that restricted it from rising to the importance it would later play during the First International Age. Canaan contains two main areas that can serve as thoroughfares for diplomacy and commerce. These are the *Via Maris* (Way of the sea) along the coast, and the "King's highway" through the trans-Jordan area. However, almost all of the major Canaanite cities were located in the lowlands away from these two natural highways.[19] Thus, even seizure of the major thoroughfares through Canaan did not guarantee control over the region. Furthermore, the hilly country of northern and southern Canaan around such cities as Jerusalem and Gezer limited both the area that these cities could control, as well as any foreign power's ability to exert effective control over them.[20] The area was also a center for several pastoral groups such as the Shasu of Edom and the Sutu, who were constantly moving in and out of the region and remained outside the direct control of any central authority.[21] Maintenance of power within the region required the ability to control isolated and rugged regions. Canaanite city-states themselves were limited in their scope by the rugged terrain, meaning that no Canaanite city-state was able to stabilize the region internally.

Around 1490 BCE, the Egyptians under pharaoh Tuthmosis III began a gradual conquest of Canaan. Egypt had just emerged from under the rule of the Hyksos, foreign invaders from Asia, and Tuthmosis's conquest can be seen as "striking back" against the

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Susan Frankenstein, "The Phoenicians in the Far West - A function of Neo-Assyrian imperialism," n *Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology* 7 (Special issue: Power and Propaganda - A symposium on ancient empires), (1979), 264.

[17] Abraham Malamat, "Northern Canaan and the Mari Texts," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the 20th Century*, ed. James A. Saunders (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc. 1970), 166.

[18] Amelie Kurht, *The Ancient Near East, Volume 1* (New York: Routledge. 1995), 302.

[19] Kurht, 318.

[20] Alan James, "Egypt and her Vassals: The Geopolitical Dimension," *Amarna Diplomacy- The beginnings of international relations,* Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2000), 114.

[21] Kurht, 320.

invaders and creating a buffer against further invasion.[22] Originally, the Egyptians attempted to rule and administer Canaan directly. A rebellion by 330 local Canaanite rulers at Megiddo prompted a second Egyptian invasion and reconquest of the area.[23] After the defeat of the rebellion, a compromise seems to have been reached: the rebellious princes all pledged to serve Tuthmosis and his descendants, while Tuthmosis pledged to support each of the princes in his position of power.[24] The administration of Canaan was reorganized; rather than direct control, Canaan functioned under its own local princes, who served as "vassals" of the Egyptian pharaoh.[25] This contrasted with Egyptian policy within Nubia. Egyptian Nubia was directly controlled and administered by Egypt; Egyptian temples were built in Nubian territory, Nubians were incorporated into the Egyptian army and Egyptian garrisons and Egyptian governors were dispatched from the center to administer cities and territories within Nubia. Within Canaan, the complete Canaanite administrative structure for each of its city-states remained intact; however, the Canaanite prince now had the additional title of Egyptian "mayor".[26] There was no attempt to incorporate the Canaanites into Egyptian cults or Egyptian culture; the Canaanite city-states and Canaanite practices were largely left to their own devices and ignored by the Egyptians. Canaanite troops were not incorporated into the Egyptian standing army; instead they remained under the control of their own officers and own local rulers.[27]

The main concerns of the Egyptians were tribute and security. Canaanite rulers were obliged to receive Egyptian envoys and furnish them with whatever goods, troops, and services they might need, provide the caravans going to and from the pharaoh with secure passage, and most importantly to promptly provide whatever goods the pharaoh called for.[28] Local Egyptian garrisons were stationed in order to exert pressure when necessary, but these were mostly aimed at the other Great Powers, and were rarely used against local rulers.[29] As with Egyptian mayors, the Canaanite mayors held full responsibility for everything within the city-state they administered.[30]

The Egyptian correspondence with the Canaanite mayors was largely concerned with defense, with constant admonitions that the mayors be "on guard". A typical letter from the pharaoh to a vassal states:

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[22] John Paul Frandsen, "Egyptian Imperialism," *Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology* 7 (Special issue: Power and Propaganda - A symposium on ancient empires), (1979), 178.
[23] Kurht, 322
[24] Ibid.
[25] Kurht, 323.
[26] Donald B Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times.* (Princeton: The Princeton University Press. 1992), 198.
[27] Frandsen, 177.
[28] Redford, 199.
[29] James, 113.
[30] Nadav Na'aman, "The Egyptian-Canaanite Correspondence," in *Amarna Diplomacy: The beginnings of international relations,* Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, eds. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2000), 131.

> Thus the king. He herewith dispatches to you this tablet, saying to you, Be on your guard. You are to guard the place of the king where you are…. And be on your guard! Be on your guard! Do not be negligent! And may you prepare before the arrival of the archers of the king food in abundance…. Indeed he is going to reach you very quickly, and he will cut off the heads of the enemies of the king.[31]

Mayors were charged with maintaining the integrity of their holdings in the face of attacks by brigands known as the Apiru, an unidentified group that seemed to be comprised of brigands and outcasts specifically opposed to Egyptian rule.[32] Another letter states:

> May the king, my lord, be informed that the Apiru that rose up…against the lands, the god of the king, my lord, gave to me, and I smote him…. So may it seem right in the sight of the king, my lord, and may he send Yanhamu so that we may all wage war and you restore the land of the king, my lord, to its borders.[33]

A further letter from a vassal claimed, "If this year there are no (Egyptian) archers, then all lands will be joined to the Apiru".[34] The Apiru consisted of semi-nomadic pastoral groups that moved in and out of the region and were largely outside of the control of the Canaanite city-states.[35] While unable to completely eliminate the problem, military action by the Canaanites against the Apiru succeeded, at least, in keeping both parties occupied enough to allow extensive trade within the region. Canaanite forces could not be turned against the minimal Egyptian presence, and brigandry in the countryside was continually checked by Canaanite military operations, all without the Egyptians having to expend resources to hold the territory as a whole. Furthermore, the Apiru were used as mercenaries by the Canaanite city-states in their internal conflicts with one another.[36]

This eliminated two problems for the Egyptians. First, the Canaanite cities were preoccupied with fighting one another rather than the Egyptians. Second, the Canaanites engaged in battle with hired mercenaries made up of the Apiru, a group made up of individuals generally outside of the control of either the Egyptian or Canaanite administrations. The major issue of nomadic groups moving freely through Canaan outside the control of the government, while not eliminated, was at least moderated, stabilizing the region.

The Apiru were not the only internal threat. Canaan was comprised of hundreds of small city-states that until the Egyptian invasion had been in direct competition with one another. In the face of direct Egyptian rule, the princes had managed to put aside what differences they had and unite at Megiddo. While this united force had been defeated by

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[31] EA 367.
[32] Na'aman, 132.
[33] EA 366.
[34] EA 111.
[35] James, 116.
[36] EA 71.

the Egyptians, the threat of the Canaanite princes uniting against Egypt remained. Accordingly, the Egyptians played the various vassals against one another in order to maintain control over the region. The resulting internal wars, while certainly affecting the stability of local areas of Canaan, guaranteed that no single city-state or union of city-states was able to challenge Egyptian dominance, and thus destabilize the entire region. One such internal war is described in a letter to pharaoh: "May the king, my lord, know that since the return (to Egypt) of the archers, Lab'ayu has waged war against me… May the king save his city lest Lab'ayu seize it."[37] As this particular internal war continued, the forces of Lab'ayu were defeated, prompting a subsequent letter to pharaoh from Lab'ayu:

> As to your (pharaoh) having written me, 'Guard the men who seized the city,' how am I to guard such men? It was in war that the city was seized…. On the other hand, if you also order, 'Fall down beneath them so they can strike you,' I will do it. I will guard the men that seized the city and my god. They are the despoilers of my father, but I will guard them.[38]

The outcome can thus be determined. Lab'ayu attempted a war against another Canaanite prince, was defeated, and lost territory to the victors. Lab'ayu was then ordered to obey and guard the forces that defeated him, something that he complained about but stated he would obey.

Internal struggles among Canaanite city-states thus cropped up from time to time, as individual city-states attempted to expand their own territory. Each side would make an appeal to pharaoh for help, and provide an explanation of their actions. Thus, the balance of the war lay in the hands of pharaoh. He had the option of supporting one side or the other, thus checking the overt expansion of any single Canaanite city-state. In the case of two powerful Canaanite city-states squaring off, pharaoh had the option simply not to become involved and to allow the two sides to exhaust each other in battle, entering into the fray only when it was most opportune for Egypt.

The geography of Canaan posed further problems for the Egyptians. The southern coastal plains of the Levant were easily accessible to the Egyptian armies, and overall posed little problems to the administration, as evidenced by the lack of correspondence with these southern vassals.[39] However, the farther away from the coast and farther north one traveled, the more mountainous the terrain became, and therefore the harder it was for an ancient army to reach. It was in these areas that the Egyptians placed small garrisons for defense, and in these areas that the policy of playing vassals against one another was more often used. Correspondence from this region deals almost exclusively with the vassals requesting aid from Egypt to defeat their enemies, or retake "the king's land", and so forth.[40]

Abdi-Heba, the Canaanite mayor of Jerusalem, one of these hill-cities, writes as follows:

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[37] EA 244.
[38] EA 252.
[39] James, 114.
[40] James 115.

> Addaya has taken the garrison that you sent in the charge of Haya… May the king, my lord, know that no garrison of the king is with me… may the king send 50 men as a garrison to protect the land. The entire land of the king has deserted.[41]

Elsewhere, Abdi-Heba wrote:

> Miliku and Tagi brought troops into Quiltu against me…. May the king know that all the lands are at peace, but I am at war. May the king provide for his land…. If there are no archers, then the king will have neither lands nor mayors. Consider Jerusalem! This neither my father nor my mother gave to me… Do not abandon it, and send this year a garrison, and send right here the commissioner of the king…. As the king has placed his name in Jerusalem forever, he cannot abandon it, the land of Jerusalem.[42]

These letters provide a clear example of Egypt's policy of using one vassal against another. Two vassals had brought troops against Jerusalem, and rather than halting or moving against its servants, the Egyptians allowed the war to occur, and in fact removed their garrison from Jerusalem. Further, Abdi-Heba claimed that the king gave Jerusalem to him, since he did not inherit it. Thus, his entire position there rested on the Egyptian pharaoh's authority. Abdi-Heba had no local loyalties or familial alliances he could draw on in order to bolster his position. He was entirely dependent on the pharaoh for defense of his position. The Egyptian vassal system dealt with the difficulties posed by the Canaanite hill cities in a way far more effective than direct Egyptian rule of Canaan.

Overall, the political situation within Canaan stabilized under Egyptian suzerainty. Competition among individual city-states was checked by the actions of the pharaoh for or against any one city-state. Yet the lack of direct administration and direct military presence on Egypt's part ensured that the Canaanite princes did not have a single enemy to focus on and fight against; rather, leaving the Canaanite cities in the hands of the Canaanite princes ensured that the Canaanites continued to fight each other, whereas Egypt was able to remain unscathed. Canaan remained too splintered put up a united front against Egypt or any other power, and any internal conflict could be regulated and decided in Egypt's favor.

The Egyptian invasion of Canaan brought Egypt directly into contact with the kingdoms of the Near East. Northern Canaan was under the direct control of the kingdom of the Mittani. Egypt and Mittani fought a brief war after the battle of Megiddo. Afterwards, Mittani withdrew from northern Canaan in the early 14th century BCE. The Egyptian victory brought diplomatic contact and congratulatory gifts from both the Hatti and Babylonian kingdoms, and ushered in the First International Age.[43] Egypt's entrance into Canaan thus encouraged the correspondence between the Great Powers. This contact also created a massive trading network that extended from the island of Crete and

[41] EA 289.
[42] EA 287.
[43] Kurht, 339.

mainland Greece to the steppes of northern Iran. Egypt became the exclusive source of gold, ivory, ebony, and alabaster for the entire region.[44] In Babylon, the Kassite dynasty had reconquered the Gulf coastland and reestablished copper trade with Bahrain. The Kassites also built a series of fortresses to protect trade routes into northern Iran that supplied Babylonia with chariots, horses, and lapis lazuli.[45] Hatti became the source for raw iron and iron weaponry for the region. In addition, Cyprus and Greece became suppliers of bronze and other goods for the entire region.[46]

While each of these kingdoms had its own means of procuring raw goods and creating finished materials, the entire trade network passed through Canaan.[47] By the late 14th century BCE, the Canaanite cities became completely concentrated on the procurement, processing, and shipment of raw materials throughout the region.[48] Consequently, Egypt was not the only power with an interest within Canaan: areas of Canaan lay within the sphere of influence of several of the Great Powers.[49] After being driven out by Egypt, the Mittani kingdom attempted unsuccessfully to stir up rebellions against the Egyptians for roughly a century.[50] While nominally a vassal of the Egyptians, the northern city-state of Ugarit entered into a treaty of vassalage with the kingdom of Hatti.[51] In short, Canaan became a highly disputed area between Babylon, Assyria, Hatti, Mittani, and Egypt, each with its own interests in the region, and each, at various times, making a play for control.[52]

This rivalry for influence and control in Canaan helped shape the El Amarna correspondence. In one case, Abdi-Heba writes from Jerusalem stating,

> With regard to the Kasites (Babylonians),… Though the house is well fortified, they attempted a very serious crime. They took their tools, and I had to seek shelter by a support for the roof. And so if he (pharaoh) is going to send troops into Jerusalem, let them come with a garrison for regular service…. And please make the Kasites (Babylonians) responsible for the evil deed. I was almost killed by the Kasites (Babylonians) in my own house. May the king make an inquiry in their regard.[53]

The passage documents a typical incident of outside interference. Babylonian agents attempted to break into the palace and assassinate the Canaanite mayor of Jerusalem. In addition to Abdi-Heba's request for a garrison for protection against other vassals, he noted that the Babylonians had been active against him recently in Jerusalem and that a

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[44] Carlo Zaccagnini, "The Interdependence of the Great Powers," in *Amarna Diplomacy*, 145,
[45] Kurht, 340-341; Zaccagnini, 146,
[46] Zaccagnini, 146.
[47] Frankenstein, 264.
[48] Frankenstein, 265.
[49] Frandsen, 179.
[50] Kurht, 323.
[51] Kurht, 302.
[52] James, 113.
[53] EA 287.

garrison was needed to secure the city against them. A similar letter from Abi-Milku, in describing the state of affairs, the mayor specifically noted that "There are no Hittite troops about," implying that the pharaoh would have specific interest in whatever movements the Hittites made through the area.[54]

Despite various plays by other Great Powers for control within the region, Canaan remained firmly under Egyptian control throughout the First International Age. The Egyptian system of rule through vassalage and its hands-off approach to the region meant that there was no single force within Canaan that the other Great Powers could focus against. Egyptian forces within the region consisted of small, local garrisons, with much of the control of the region left in the hands of the local Canaanite rulers. Thus, in order to conquer the region, a foreign power would have had to face off individually with at least 330 Canaanite city-states, while still facing the threat that at any point in the conquest it might have to face off against the Egyptian army as well. The size and scope of such a military campaign was well beyond the means of any ancient army. Such a campaign implied maintaining an army in the field not just for a season, but for years and years, as well as the ability to take fortified cities and consistently provide adequate reinforcements. Thus, the possible benefits that a Great Power might gain from a conquest of Canaan had to be balanced against the tremendous cost that such a campaign would entail. This situation resulted from Egypt's ruling the region through local proxies rather than by direct control.

Nevertheless, such an attempt to conquer Canaan was made at least once by a Great Power. After the initial invasion of Canaan by Tuthmosis III, the Hittite kingdom gradually began to infiltrate and conquer northern Canaan. This conquest occurred according to the means outlined above: gradual infiltration and conquest of individual city-states over a period of roughly a century. The Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II (1290-1224 BCE) began a policy of reconquest of the areas lost to Hittite influence, which came to a head in 1286 BCE at the battle of Kadesh. The result of the battle was essentially a draw, resulting in a treaty between the two powers, which read as follows:

> Now aforetime, since eternity, as regards the policy of the great ruler of Egypt and the great chief of Hatti---the god did not permit hostility to be made between them, by means of a treaty. But in the time of Muwattalli, the great chief of Hatti, my brother, he fought with Ramesse-mi-Amun, the great ruler of Egypt. But hereafter, beginning from this clay, behold Hattusili, the great chief of Hatti, is in a treaty for making permanent the policy which Pre made and Setekh made for the land of Egypt with the land of Hatti, so as not to permit hostilities to be made between them forever…. As to the regular treaty, which there was in the time of Subbiluliuma, the great chief of Hatti, and likewise the regular treaty, which was in the time of Muwattalli, the great chief of Hatti, my father, I take hold of it. Behold, Ramesse-mi-Amun, the great ruler of Egypt, takes

[54] EA 151.

> hold of the peace which it makes together with us from this day; and we will act according to this regular policy.[55]

Thus, the result of this long period of warfare between the two powers was a return to *status quo ante bellum*. The task before the Hittites, in order to exert power in Canaan, had been to conquer individual city-states. The direct confrontation with Egypt, while resulting in a draw, drained Hittite military resources, so that a continued offensive against the individual Canaanite princes became unfeasible. Despite having warded off the Egyptian army, hundreds of Canaanite princes remained in place as part of the Egyptian vassal system. Thus, since neither power was the victor in open conflict, the Hittites were forced to return to the status quo.

It should not be assumed that the status quo within the region was necessarily detrimental to the powers outside of Egypt. Since the Egyptians had no direct control over Canaan, the region served as a type of "free-trade" area among the Great Powers. The Amarna correspondence contains no requests from the Great Powers for access to or goods from Canaan. Rather, the Great Powers were concerned with the acquisition of gold from Egypt, which came primarily from Nubia, which was under direct Egyptian administration.[56] Canaanite cities thrived solely on the propagation of a mercantile trading economy throughout the region. Furthermore, all the Great Powers had trading relations within Canaan that dated back several centuries. The fact that at no point in their correspondence did the Great Powers specifically request either goods from or access to Canaan therefore suggests that permission from Egypt was not necessary in order to access Canaanite trade. In contrast, the requests for gold from Egypt establish that such permission was needed to access certain goods from within the Egyptian empire. If direct trade had been possible with Egyptian Nubia, then such requests for goods and access would have made no sense.

The major difference between Canaan and Nubia lay in the nature of their administration by Egypt. Nubia was directly controlled and administered by Egypt, whereas Canaan functioned under the rule of its own local rulers. The lack of direct Egyptian administration in Canaan allowed the Great Powers to access the region through the Egyptian proxy rulers at the local level, rather than having to interact with the pharaoh's court at the highest level. Correspondence between the Great Powers and the Canaanite princes appealed to the Egyptian vassals as "kings" and made specific requests of them.[57] Thus, competition for the region was minimized, since the Great Powers each had the ability to access the region because of Egypt's lack of presence and dependence on local rulers.

The concern that the Great Powers did voice to the Egyptian pharaoh dealt with the security and integrity of the region. One of the major obligations of the Canaanite princes was to ensure the safe passage of both Egyptian and foreign officials and

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[55] John D. Richards, "The Treaty Between Hattusilis and Ramesses II", *World Civilization E-Source.* September, 2004. <http://www.bakeru.edu/html/faculty/jrichards/World%20Civ%20I/E-Source%2011-Treaty.htm> (5 December, 2004).
[56] EA 6, 7, 10.
[57] Na'aman, 132.

merchants through the region.[58] When foreign merchants were robbed in Canaanite territory, appeals for justice by foreign rulers went directly to the pharaoh, not to the Canaanite subject.[59] The Egyptian pharaoh was admonished by the foreign powers to make sure that the security and integrity of Canaan was maintained.[60] Such was the concern among the Great Powers for the stability of the region that even when individual Canaanite princes themselves offered to support a foreign power rather than Egypt, such requests were denied in favor sustaining the Egyptian vassal system. For example, a surviving letter from Burra-Buriash of Babylon to the pharaoh states,

> In the time of Kurgazla, my ancestor, all the Canaanites wrote here to him saying, 'Come to the border of the country so we can revolt and be allied with you.' My ancestor sent this (reply), saying, 'Forget about being allied with me. If you become enemies of the king of Egypt, and are allied with anyone else, will I not then come and plunder you?"… For the sake of your ancestor my ancestor did not listen to them. [61]

In essence, Egypt acted as the "police force" for the region. Beyond stabilizing the internal politics of the region, Egypt was charged by the Great Powers with ensuring that the region remained open and passable. This ensured that Canaan remained the crossroads between the Great Powers. Access to Canaan allowed extensive trade within the region as well as diplomatic contact between all of the Great Powers. The relative neutrality of Canaanite territory ensured that the Great Powers were able to interact on an economic and diplomatic level outside of regional tensions and military threats.

Thus, Canaan became the "lynchpin" for the entire international system that emerged in the 15th through 13th centuries in the Near East. Conditions within Canaan and Egyptian policy within Canaan were the deciding factors in drawing the Great Powers of the Near East into the complex diplomatic and economic interchange that made up the First International Age. The key to Canaan's position in this system was the Egyptian rule of Canaan through local vassals. Canaan had been a key site in regional trade for centuries before the First International Age. However, internal competition between local city-states within Canaan created an unstable environment that limited the role that the region was able to play in international trade and relations. The Egyptian policy of vassalage and playing vassals against each other in order to stabilize the region meant that, while conflict did occur, it occurred under Egyptian control and direction and only within isolated areas of Canaan. The lack of overbearing Egyptian presence, meanwhile, meant there was no single force against which the Canaanites could focus their military efforts and thereby destabilize the region. Further, the minimal Egyptian presence in the region meant that no foreign power had a single force against which to focus; there was no core military force within the region. This meant that conquest of the region by a foreign power would have been a near-titanic feat, since a foreign power would have had to face off with over 300 local Canaanite rulers in order to wrest control

[58] Redford, 199.
[59] EA 7.
[60] EA 16.
[61] EA 9.

of the region from Egypt. Instead, the "hands off" rule of Canaan by Egypt allowed the foreign Great Powers to access the region at a local level rather than having to deal directly with Egyptian administration.

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Thus, Canaan functioned nominally as neutral territory, where each of the Great Powers was able to access an international mercantile economy and create diplomatic contacts without directly competing. Egypt maintained this system by allowing Canaan to function under local rulers and simply "policing" the region, making sure it was open and accessible enough to allow continued economic and diplomatic contact between the powers.

The First International Age was tied together through common economic and cultural ties to the region of Canaan. It must be noted that while Canaan was the centerpiece for this system and the region through which this entire system functioned, Canaan was in no way the beneficiary of this system. Stability within Canaan was continually regulated, with each city-state balanced against the rest, guaranteeing that no single city-state was able to rise to prominence and thereby hijack or destabilize the international society. The subjugation of Canaan allowed it to serve as common ground for the Great Powers, acting as an intermediary between the various cultures of the region as well as serving as the mercantile center for the regional economy.

Canaan presents a vastly different model for inter-state interaction than either our modern global economy or systems we may be more familiar with, such as the colonial mercantile economies of Europe. As the first known significant international society in world history, Canaan illustrates the prerequisites necessary for such a system to emerge and function in the ancient world: a cultural intermediary, economic significance to each of the major players, geographic centrality (or at the very least geographic accessibility), and a level of internal stability that allowed interaction to take place within and throughout the region. Whether or not such factors are indeed universal prerequisites, or were simply significant in the Amarna Age and specific to Canaan itself, is a question for future comparative research.

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