

CHAPTER 17

BRIDES AND BROTHER KINGS

DIPLOMACY AND THE GREAT POWERS

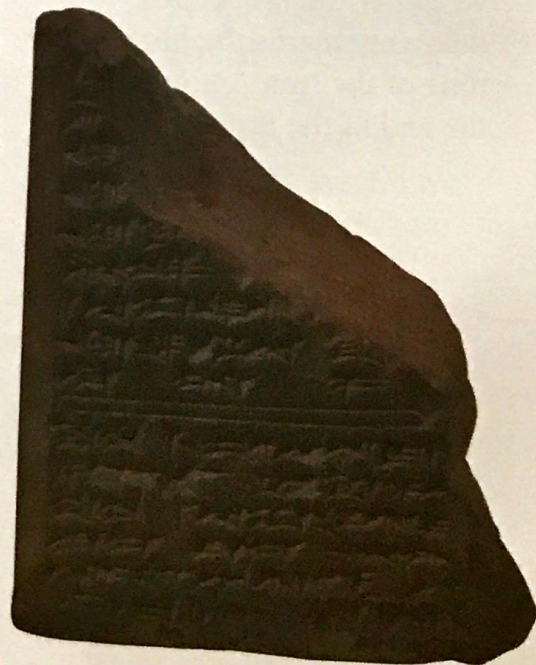
Excited people must have jammed the streets of Thebes—standing on tiptoe, straining to see the young princess who would soon become a queen. Attendants carried her in a tall, covered chair. It was 1350 BCE, and Tadu-Heba was on her way to the palace to marry Egypt's aging king. She had traveled from Syria all the way to Egypt's capital city with servants and thousands of beautiful gifts, including chariots, ceremonial weapons made of gold, four beautiful horses, thousands of bows and arrows, and four suits of armor. Her father, Tushratta, wrote to Egypt's king, Nimmureya, who was also known as Amenhotep III: "It is all of these wedding-gifts, . . . that Tushratta, the king of Mittani, gave to Nimmureya, the king of Egypt. . . . He gave them at the same time that he gave Tadu-Heba, his daughter, to Egypt and to Nimmureya to be his wife."

Although Tushratta described the wedding gifts as being for Egypt's king, in fact, most of them were for the bride—a rich dowry from her doting father. He sent her off with woolen shirts, leather shoes, gloves, sashes, a silver washbasin, combs, spoons, trays, warm blankets and bedspreads, scented oils, five sculpted dogs made of silver, and hundreds of other things that she might need or want in her new life. She also brought elegant jewelry with her, such as an iron bracelet covered with six shekels worth of gold and bright-blue stones (lapis lazuli) set in a bird pattern. The princess was marrying the most powerful man in the whole region, and she would need to dress the part.

The people of Egypt celebrated the marriage between Tadu-Heba and Nimmureya. For them, the union promised peace between Egypt and the distant land of Mittani, a kingdom in northern Mesopotamia and Syria. But for Tadu-

“ EGYPTIAN,
BABYLONIAN, AND
HITTITE LETTERS

“ Tushratta, letter to wife of
Amenhotep III, 14th century BCE



In this cuneiform letter, Mittani's King Tushratta begs Queen Tiy for a gold statue of his daughter, a young wife of the Egyptian king.

IRON—NOT JUST FOR HAMMERS AND NAILS

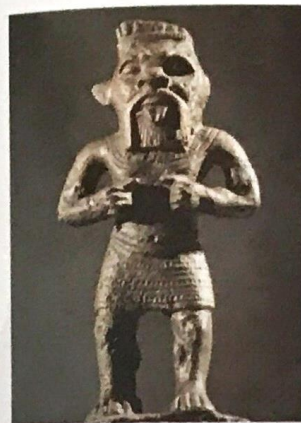
Near Eastern peoples were the first to use iron. Scholars used to think that the Hittites used iron weapons, and that this gave them an advantage over their enemies. The Hittites did mine iron ore in Anatolia, but this early iron was good only for decorative things, such as jewelry. Around 1200 BCE, when the Hittites were no longer a major power, other peoples figured out how to separate iron ore from its impurities so that it would be strong enough to be used for weapons and tools. This discovery marks the beginning of the Iron Age and the end of the Bronze Age.

Heba, it was the end of all that she had known. She had traveled for many miles over land and by boat. What must she have felt as she entered Egypt and saw its wonders—the massive Sphinx and the huge triangular pyramids? And how did she feel as the moment drew near when she would meet her husband for the first time? Was she eager to become queen of this rich, important land, or was she afraid, so far from her family? She must have known that Amenhotep spoke no Hurrian, her own language. And she certainly knew that he already had many wives. Her own aunt was one of them.

Marriages between royalty of different countries, such as the one between Princess Tadu-Heba and King Amenhotep III, were common at this time. Amenhotep's wives also included Babylonian princesses and a princess from Anatolia. The king had so many wives that he could



Paintings, including this one of a bird landing in a marsh, decorated the walls of Amenhotep's palace, where Tadu-Heba came to live.



The Egyptian god Bes clenches his fists. Although he looks fierce, Tadu-Heba might have prayed to him when she was married to the Egyptian king, because Bes was the Egyptian god of marriage.

not always keep track of them. One Babylonian king wrote to Amenhotep asking what had happened to his sister: "Here you are asking for my daughter in marriage, but my sister... is [already] with you, and no one...

seems... to know if now she is alive or... dead."

Perhaps to make sure that Tadu-Heba didn't get lost in Amenhotep's collection of wives, her father sent her regular gifts and even asked the Egyptian king to send him a gold statue of her, though, as far as we know, he never received it.

In King Tushratta's day, the kings of Egypt, Mittani, Babylon, and Hatti were at peace with one another. After centuries of fighting for control of land, they had formed a close-knit group known as the Great Kings. The fifth great power, the island of Alashiya (now known as Cyprus) managed to get in the Great King club because it had something that all the others wanted: copper. Copper, a major ingredient in bronze, was needed everywhere to make weapons and tools.

Egypt was the richest of the five great powers because it had gold. But the others had goods to exchange, too: tin, textiles, horses, silver, iron, glass, perfumes, wooden objects, and lapis lazuli—a dark blue stone used in jewelry. The five kings called one another "brother" as a way of claiming friendship and ensuring peace between their kingdoms. They kept their messengers busy carrying letters and gifts back and forth between them. Their wives wrote to one another, too.

Long before Tushratta, around 1500 BCE, a new dynasty had come to power in Northern Mesopotamia and Syria. These kings were Tadu-Heba's ancestors, and they created the kingdom of Mittani. Their people spoke many different languages, but the kings of Mittani used Akkadian as

“ Burra-buriyash, letter to Amenhotep III, 14th century BCE

SIMILAR, BUT NOT THE SAME

Egypt's religious beliefs were different from the rest of the Near Eastern world's. Whereas most Near Easterners saw their kings as powerful human beings, the Egyptians worshiped their kings—called pharaohs—as gods. And Egypt's writing system was completely different, too: they used hieroglyphs rather than cuneiform signs. Like cuneiform, hieroglyphs stood for sounds, whole words, or symbols. But there are differences. In hieroglyphs, vowels were not expressed in syllables, as they were in cuneiform. Also, formal hieroglyphs look more like pictures than cuneiform's wedge-shaped signs.

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE ME?

The five Great Kings never met face to face, and some weren't even sure where the other kings' countries were. For example, when a Babylonian king became ill, he sent a note to the Egyptian king to complain that the Egyptian king had not sent him a "Get Well" note. (This letter was found at Amarna, in Egypt.) An Egyptian messenger explained that Egypt was too far away for the king to have known his brother king was ill. The Babylonian king found this hard to believe. It was, in fact, a journey of more than 1,500 miles from Babylon to Amarna. If a messenger had traveled 20 miles a day, taking the fastest possible route between the two countries, it would have taken him two and a half months to get to the foreign court, and another two and a half months to bring a message back.

If the Egyptian king had a statue made of Tadu-Heba, it would have been in this style, with the princess fashionably dressed in an elaborate wig and a pleated dress.

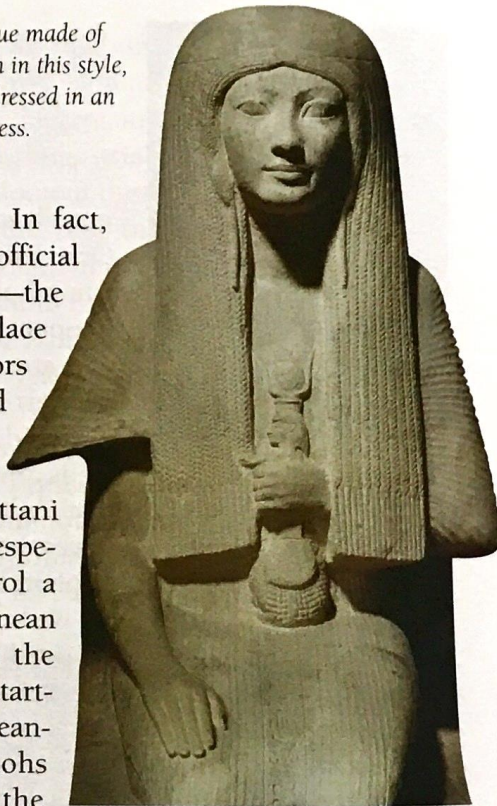
their official language. In fact, Akkadian became the official language of diplomacy—the language used by palace scribes and ambassadors whenever they talked with officials from other lands.

The kings of Mittani wanted more land and especially wanted to control a port on the Mediterranean Sea. The Hittites had the same aim, so the two started out as enemies. Meanwhile, Egypt's pharaohs (kings) had caught the same empire-building bug.

In the 15th century BCE, the Egyptians and the Hittites both fought against Mittani. But by the 14th century, the borders between these great powers became more settled. Perhaps each king realized that he couldn't conquer the other powers and decided that it would make more sense to live in peace and trade with one another.

The five "brother" kings enjoyed a long era of friendship. The 14th century BCE is sometimes known as the International Age of ancient Near Eastern history. We know so much about it because all the kings wrote to one another in Akkadian using cuneiform script on baked clay tablets, which are almost indestructible, especially in the dry climate of the Egyptian desert. Tadu-Heba married Amenhotep during this time of peace.

The International Age came to a sudden end 150 years later. The reason isn't clear. But documents found at the



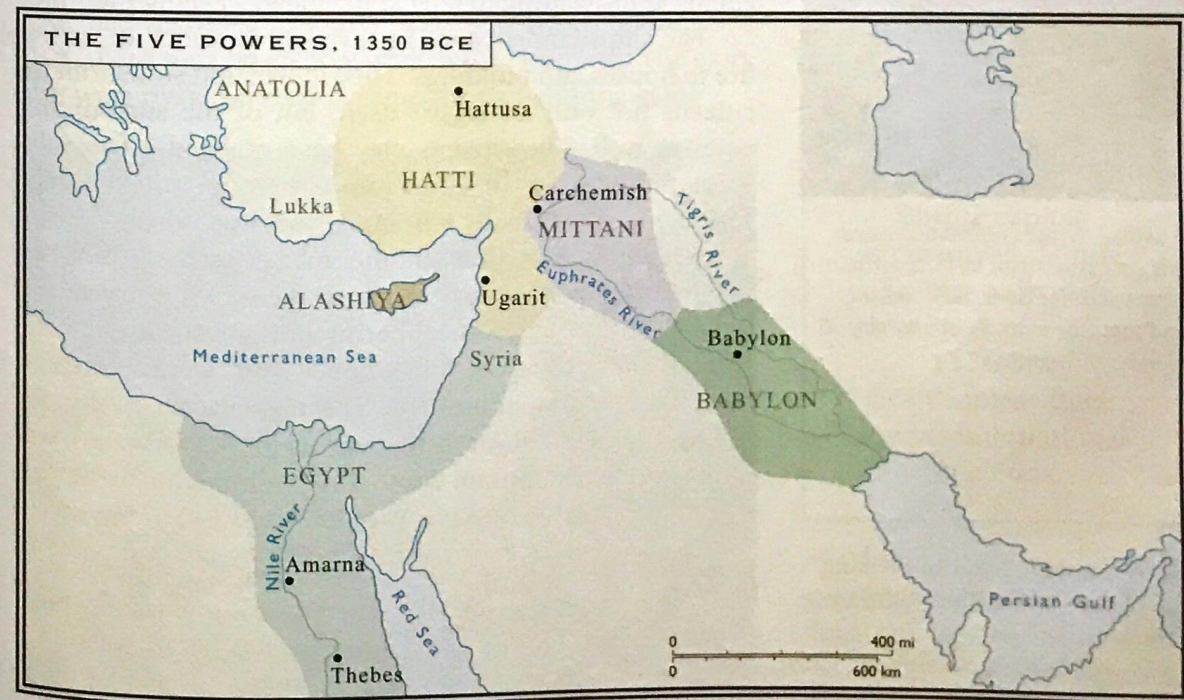
ancient city of Ugarit give us a glimpse of the disaster, just before it happened.

Ugarit, one of the great trading centers of the Hittite empire, nestled in a valley in Syria with a view of the blue Mediterranean. One day, in 1185 BCE, Ugarit's king, Ammurapi, saw an unfamiliar warship in the harbor. Then another one sailed into view. As more ships appeared on the horizon, Ammurapi grew increasingly frightened. Who were these strangers who threatened the city? The king was helpless. He had no troops to send against the enemy. He had already sent his land forces to help another Hittite king, and his navy was away too.

Ammurapi dashed off a desperate message to the king of Carchemish, an ancient city on the Euphrates in Syria.



Green fields surround the ancient city of Ugarit, with the blue Mediterranean not far away. Ugarit was a thriving center for trade, and at its center were great temples to the gods Baal and Dagan.



Ammurapi explained to his fellow king the looming danger and begged for help. As Ammurapi waited for his messenger to come back, more ships arrived until seven enemy ships lurked in the harbor.

Ammurapi's spirits must have sunk when he read the king's response:

As for what you have written to me: "Ships of the enemy have been seen at sea," well, you must remain firm. Indeed for your part, where are your troops...? Are they not stationed near you?... Surround your towns with ramparts. Have your troops and chariots enter there, and await the enemy with great determination.

Ammurapi needed troops, not advice. He had no way to bring his men and chariots home in time. The people of Ugarit—merchants and farmers, craftsmen, and priests—must have been worried, too. Their town had enjoyed years of wealth and ease. But now they could see mysterious enemy ships waiting to attack, like hawks eyeing their prey.

The ships landed, and the invaders swarmed in, setting fire to houses and buildings. They looted and stole from the citizens not only of Ugarit itself, but of the surrounding cities as well. The citizens may have grabbed a few valuables, but basically they just ran, abandoning their homes. The enemies eventually left, but Ugarit was in ruins.

About this same time, another messenger arrived by sea. Did he bring good news? Were Ammurapi's troops returning perhaps, or was a neighboring king promising to send help? If these were the king's hopes, they were dashed on the rocks of disappointment. The message was from the king of the island of Alashiya, begging for help. He, too, was under attack. Ammurapi wrote back, calling him "father" as a term of respect because he was one of the five Great Kings:

My father, . . . the enemy's ships came here; my cities were burned . . . Does not my father know that all my troops and chariots are in the Land of Hatti, and all my ships are in the Land of Lukka? . . . Thus, the

66 King of Carchemish, letter to the king of Ugarit, 12th century BCE



A skilled Syrian craftsman created this gold bowl, with its three circular scenes showing lions, bulls, ibexes, and fantastic animals. Archaeologists found it in Ugarit.

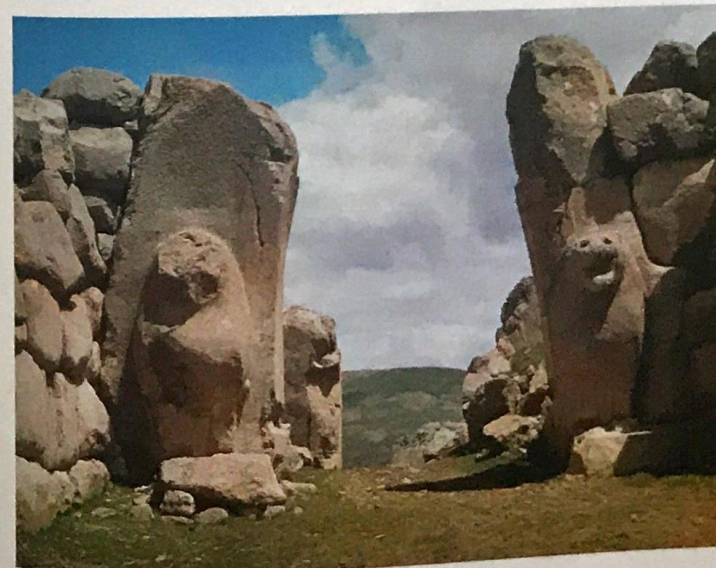
66 Ammurapi, letter to the king of Alashiya, 12th century BCE

country is abandoned to itself. . . . The seven ships of the enemy that came here inflicted great damage upon us.

Archaeologists discovered this letter and the one from the king of Carchemish in the 1950s as they excavated the remains of Ugarit. The archaeological evidence showed that the city had, in fact, burned around 1185 BCE and was never rebuilt.

Ugarit was not the only city that was mysteriously destroyed in the early years of the 12th century BCE. The Hittites' magnificent capital, the city of Hattusa, was also burned and abandoned around the same time. The invaders may have been refugees from another part of the Mediterranean, perhaps related to a group of people who attacked Egypt around the same time. The Egyptians called them the Sea Peoples.

The Near East was a changed place by 1100 BCE. The kingdoms of Mittani, Hatti, and Alashiya were gone. Egypt was struggling to stay in one piece, and Babylonia was in decline. Trade had shriveled to nearly nothing. For several hundred years, there were no great powers in the Near East. The glory days were over. Survival became the name of the game.



Massive gateposts, carved into the shape of roaring lions, still stand at Hattusa. Invaders destroyed many of its city walls around 1200 BCE.

THE INTERNATIONAL AGE

1595–1500 BCE
Near East in turmoil

1500 BCE
Kassites in power in Babylonia; kingdom of Mittani begins; Hittite Empire grows

1387–1350 BCE
Amenhotep III reigns in Egypt; height of International Age; diplomatic marriages between Great Kings of Egypt, Babylonia, Mittani, and Hatti

1185 BCE
Invaders destroy Canaanite towns; Hittite capital is destroyed; Hittite Empire collapses

1176 BCE
Sea Peoples attack Egypt; International Age ends