

He then offers a detailed itinerary that indicates the possible route of Šuppiluliuma I's campaign (pp. 109–10). In the Amarna archive, the First Syrian War is matched with Rib-Hadda's report in EA 75, which reports Hatti's invasion of all the lands of Mitta<ni> and chronologically is to be placed in Time Frame I, more specifically within the last two years of Amenhotep III's reign. The Idanda archive from Qatna is associated with the First Syrian War and its immediate aftermath. In Stavi's reconstruction of this period, the Hittites fail to maintain a strong presence in Syria, which allows Mittani a speedy recovery even before the reign of Amenhotep III comes to an end.

Stavi attributes the Second Syrian War of Šuppiluliuma I to the end of the Amarna archive, therefore assigning all of Time Frame II and most of Time Frame III to the intermediate period between the two Syrian wars, which is estimated as around fifteen years in length. Despite being heavily fragmentary, the three to four tablets of DŠ that seem to cover this time indicate a long period of fighting in Anatolia, which must have diverted the attention of the Hittites from Syrian affairs.

While we learn about the Hittite activities during the Second Syrian War from various documents, our primary sources remain the Amarna letters and DŠ. After discussion of all sources, Stavi summarizes Hittite activity in multiple steps based on information mainly from the Amarna letters (pp. 173–74 and in more detail in Table 4). It is estimated that the time period from the Hittite attack on Amqa, which apparently took place while Aziru of Amurru was in Egypt, until the end of the Amarna archive was around four years, referred to as the Late Amarna Subset. Stavi assumes that there was a short gap between the end of the Late Amarna Subset and the Second Syrian War as described in DŠ, and he therefore summarizes the events of DŠ thus (Table 5, p. 175) as a continuation of the events of Late Amarna Subset.

Although the attack on Amqa is also mentioned in DŠ, Stavi suggests that its discussion here might be part of a review and summary of previous events by the scribe (p. 171). He offers a similar explanation for the mention of the death of the Egyptian king Nibhururiya in DŠ shortly after the Hittite attack on Amqa, while there is no indication of the death of a pharaoh in the Amarna letters. Various possibilities are considered for the identity of Nibhururiya, and for his interpretation Stavi finds it more likely that this king was either Akhenaten or Smenkhare. Finally, he identifies the solar omen of Muršili II's tenth year as that of 1312 BCE, dating Šuppiluliuma I's death to approximately 1323, six years after the start of the Second Syrian War.

The scarcity of relevant sources and their fragmentary nature remain a serious handicap and often prevent the author from reaching firm conclusions, yet his in-depth analysis offers us the most plausible scenarios; overall this study is a valuable contribution. Appendix 2 includes tables itemizing the identified events in chronological order according to sources. Due to small page size several of these tables are spread across multiple pages and numerous footnotes, thereby causing a bit of visual discomfort, but these are otherwise useful summaries for keeping track of the suggested order of events and documents. This book does not include any text editions and avoids lengthy quotes. Therefore serious readers will find it useful to have the editions or translations of the main sources at hand.

The Reign of Tudhaliya II and Šuppiluliuma I is a significant study of primary sources not only for Hittite studies, but also for scholars of the ancient Near East who have an interest in the Amarna period chronology.

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Canaanite Scribes in the Amarna Letters. By JUAN-PABLO VITA. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 406. Münster: UGARIT-VERLAG, 2015. Pp. xii + 179, 78 plates. €97.

Vita's book presents his long-time effort to group the Amarna letters (*EA*) from Canaan according to the individual scribes who wrote them. In pursuit of this goal, he relies heavily on petrographic analysis (Goren, Finkelstein, and Na'aman 2004), considerations based on the content of the letters, and various proposals made in the literature with which he has excellent familiarity. Vita's own contribution

consists in the paleographic identification of the groups of tablets written by individual scribes. He bases his conclusions on perceived similarities of the general ductus and the characteristic shapes of certain signs.

The main part of the book discusses the epistolary corpora of individual cities. For each city, Vita provides a detailed bibliography and an updated discussion of the difficulties inherent in assigning letters to a particular city. He then assesses the similarity of the script of the individual letters and, based on "scribal hands," he assigns the letters to a scribe or scribes from each city. This procedure results in the distinction between the historical corpus of the city (based on the data in the heading of the letters and their content) and the linguistic corpus (based on the scribes' identification).

The discrepancies between the two groups are in some cases significant. For example, the historical corpus of Gezer counts fourteen letters while the linguistic one has twenty or twenty-one. Similarly expanded is the corpus from Ashkelon: from fifteen to twenty-one letters. More importantly, the linguistic corpora of some cities disappear, as they seem to have been written by scribes from other localities. These are Iqrata and Ardatu (letters written by the Amurru scribes), Ḥašabu (by the Beqa' Alliance scribe), Širi-Bašāni, Qanū, Tūbu, Našiba, and Šas'imu (single letters, all written by the Mušihuna scribe), Taanach (the letter assigned to the Megiddo scribe), and Šapuma (two letters written by scribe no. 1 from Gezer). I must stress the usefulness of this part of the book as it provides updated summaries of the scholarly proposals on the origin of the individual letters with their critical evaluation as well as an exhaustive bibliography.

The last part of the book contains tables which summarize the results of the study and several case studies based on the newly proposed assignments of the letters. The long appendix is an essential part of the book: it provides black-and-white photographs of many of the discussed tablets and some close-ups arranged according to the scribes who wrote them.

In spite of being carefully researched, Vita's book displays some conceptual and methodological weaknesses that negatively affect the specific import of this study. Its deficiencies become clearer when Vita's formulation of the "paleographic method" is compared to that found in a short study by Stratford (2015) in which he also identifies "scribal hands" in an epistolary corpus. Stratford duly distinguishes chirographic analysis (the attribution of documents to individual scribes) from palaeographic analysis (temporal and geographical evolution of signs). Unlike Vita, Stratford defines the terminology and explicitly demonstrates his awareness of the difficulties of chirographic analysis: "by all accounts, chirographic comparison is subjective" (Stratford 2015: 127). Having introduced terminology to describe the parts of signs and their orientation, Stratford is able to explain how the graphs differ and which characteristics make them diagnostic idiographs that can point to the scribe's identity. The lack of such definitions in Vita's book translates directly into vague references to the similarity of the script and signs. For example, on p. 18 we are told that "the scripts of letters EA 165 and 166 are closely linked, although they do not seem to be the same." We are then referred to plate VI as if the characteristics of the scripts were self-evident from the photos of several lines of the letters. Providing the evidence cannot substitute for its analysis.

Likewise, impressionistic observations (for example, the scripts "are very similar and are, in general identical, although there are significant variations in the writing of some signs," p. 82) are almost meaningless since they do not detail the process which led the author to formulate them. To be fair, Vita seems to be aware of the relevance of diagnostic idiographs and from several references one gathers the impression that these are for him especially the signs A, NA, EN, LUGAL, GĪR, and MEŠ. Occasionally, the peculiarities of the morphology of the idiographs are explicitly defined, as in the case of the sign LUGAL "with no small wedges below" (p. 61) or of the sign NA with "two clear upward tips when it appears in the combination {i-na}" (p. 116).

However, these instances are the exception rather than the rule and do not obviate the overall need for a more explicit and consistent treatment of diagnostic features. The lack of systematic exposition of the differences which define the hand of each scribe frustrates this reviewer's attempt to either discuss or critique Vita's identifications. Yet, the assessment of both the strengths and weaknesses of scholarly argumentation stands at the heart of any scientific procedure.

A telling illustration of the difficulty under consideration comes from Vita's treatment of the letters from Šamhūna (p. 71). After quoting Knudtzon, who describes the scripts of these letters as "ziemlich übereinstimmend," Vita states that "the script of both tablets is, however, completely different: without a doubt, two different scribes wrote the two letters." Vita then refers the reader to the plate which has a photo of only one letter. Because Vita neglects to put forward an argument in support of this assessment, the sole reason for preferring Vita's to Knudtzon's opinion would be trust in the capabilities and experience of the author of the newer study.

Again, based solely on the assignment of two letters from the unidentified locality of -ikmate to the scribe from Akšapa, Vita concludes that the two towns had to have maintained friendly relations at some point (p. 119). However, the opposite might equally be true: their kings were at war and the scribe who wrote these letters might have been abducted by one of them and forced into his service. Without additional evidence and broader contextualization, both proposals are working hypotheses to be presented in a circumspect manner.

Similar is the case with Vita's remarks on the letters of Rib-Hadda of Byblos, which this kinglet sent from Beirut (EA 136–38), using a local scribe for two of them (p. 107). After admitting that these two letters might have been redacted entirely in "the language of Beirut," Vita hypothesizes that they might have equally been dictated by Rib-Hadda himself in "the dialect of Byblos," in which case the scribe "copied the message literally," or produced ad hoc a "mixed dialect" by blending the linguistic traits typical of the two cities. Given that there is no evidence as to whether or not Rib-Hadda actually spoke "the Akkadian of Byblos," these proposals, while intriguing, are again entirely speculative.

A re-grouping of the Amarna letters from Canaan according to the individual scribes who wrote them has great potential for advancing the study of linguistic features of the letters since it may now begin with the analysis of individual scribal idiolects. Its results may further support Vita's identifications by discovering coherent usages in groups of tablets assigned to the same scribe. For example, the use of the base **i-na-šir* to derive the prefixed forms of *našāru* "to protect" in EA 112, 119, 123, and 130 nicely dovetails with Vita's assignment of these letters to one individual, scribe no. 8 from Byblos. However, I doubt that it is feasible to elaborate a "dialectal map of the Canaanite dialects of Amarna" (p. 134) in the sense of defining the dialects of Canaan in the Amarna age, as seems to be implied by Vita.

The Amarna letters provide a vague and imperfect reflection of local dialects thanks to the transfer of some features, while variation between individual linguistic corpora is due to scribal habits and schooling (Izre'el 1998: 3) rather than direct impact of the local vernaculars. Nevertheless, Vita's work inspires those of us engaged with the Amarna corpus to first explore and then articulate more precisely the limits posed by the evidence and then to apply a rigorous methodological reflection to the study of the ancient languages. Vita's book is a welcome step toward such a linguistic study of the Amarna letters, but a definitive palaeographic and chirographic analysis of the letters remains a *desideratum*.

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