

CHAPTER 14

TUSHRATTA'S REQUESTS TO THE PHARAOHS

Serdar Güner and Daniel Druckman

The Amarna letters (1400–1350 B.C.) demonstrate that intricate balance-of-power politics was familiar to Middle Eastern rulers millennia ago (Moran, 1992). Egyptians, Hittites, Mittanians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and leaders of lesser kingdoms formed alliances on the basis of “brotherhood” or, in equivalent terms, on the basis of equality. The equality between the rulers was established primarily by demands and offers of princesses. For example, the Mittani rulers Artatama, Artatama’s son Shutarna, and Shutarna’s son Tushratta gave daughters to the pharaohs Thutmose IV and Amenophis III, sending and receiving bride prices. However, overshadowing an apparent equality was the reality that Egypt was the hegemon in the Middle Bronze Age.

Egypt–Mittani relations were marked by conflict at the time of Thutmose III, when he attacked Mittani in 1472 B.C. (Redford, 1992: 159). Saussatar, a son of the first known Mittani king, Paratarna, then re-established Mittani control in upper-east Mesopotamia and satellite kingdoms such as Halpa (Aleppo). After this friction with no decisive result, Thutmose IV married the daughter of Saussatar’s son Artatama in 1415 B.C. (Redford, 1992: 165). Redford (1992: 165) explains Saussatar’s geostrategic position: “Under these circumstances there was little the Mittanians could do, save persevere alone in a two-front war or seek an alliance that would do away with one of the fronts. Mittani wisely chose the latter. The closer and more hostile Khatte could not be mollified, but the distant and volatile Amenophis II seemed susceptible to negotiations.” This was an alliance to seal the status quo that did not target the Hittites (Roux, 1992: 256). The alliance between Egypt and Mittani survived until the death of Amenophis III.

Tushratta insistently asked Pharaoh Akhenaten (Amenophis IV) and Teye, the pharaoh’s mother, about the fate of solid-gold statues representing himself and his daughter Tadu-Heba, a widow of Amenophis III who had then become Akhenaten’s wife. Akhenaten gave Tushratta gold-plated wooden statues instead of the solid-gold ones promised by his father, Amenophis III. Tushratta owed his misfortune to Akhenaten’s lack of interest in politics and to his defeat at the hands of the great Hittite king Suppiluliumas.

Suppiluliumas, after his accession to the Hittite throne in 1344 B.C., attacked Mittani twice, the first raid being a failure (Gurney, 1990: 23). Tushratta, having repulsed the Hittites on Suppiluliumas’ first attempt, sent a large part of the war booty to Amenophis III (Gurney, 1990: 22). The Amarna tablet EA 17 (EA refers to “El Amarna”) provides evidence for this event. In his second attempt, Suppiluliumas

took the Mittanians by surprise by entering the kingdom from the north. As a result, the Mittani capital of Washukanni was sacked and Tushratta fled. This did not, however, mean the immediate end of the Mittani kingdom. Tushratta lost territories west of the Euphrates, but it was his reliance on Egypt and military failure that provoked his murder by one of his sons (Roux, 1992: 259). The Mittani kingdom disappeared after a rising Assyria annexed former Mittani territories around 1360 B.C. (see Map 1).



Map 1. The Near East in the Amarna period.

Amenophis III died shortly after the Hittite success and his son Akhenaten became the pharaoh. The Amarna letters tablets EA 17–29 make up the Egyptian–Mittani correspondence. We will divide them into two parts: those sent by Tushratta to Nimmureya (Amenophis III) and those sent to Naphurreya (Akhenaten). In fact, the story about the golden statues involves three major actors: Nimmureya, Naphurreya, and Tushratta. Teye, Naphurreya’s mother, also received a letter from Tushratta concerning the statues (EA 26). In the correspondence, the sender is Tushratta and the pharaohs are the receivers.

The stories that follow are interpretations of the letters identified by their numbers in Moran (1992).

Tushratta’s Letters to Nimmureya

Tushratta’s letters to Nimmureya are numbered EA 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, and 24 in Moran (1992). EA 17 is a proposition to renew the Mittani–Egypt alliance. The meaning of the alliance is clearly articulated in EA 24 (Moran, 1992: 69): “...But

should in the future an enemy of my brother invade my brother's land, (then) my brother writes to me, and the Hurrian land, armor, arms, and everything concerning the enemy of my brother will be at his disposition. But should, on the other hand, there be for me an enemy—if only he did not exist—I will write to my brother, and my brother will dispatch to the land of Egypt, armor, arms, ...and everything concerning my enemy.”

Tushratta may have murdered his elder brother to ascend to the throne, and his position was not quite stabilized among the ruling Mittani elite (Roux, 1992: 259), but Tushratta tells another story to Nimmureya: “...I slew the slayers of Artashumara, my brother...” (Moran, 1992: 41).

Tushratta wants the Mittani–Egypt alliance to continue and sends them a part of the war booty and additional presents. Nimmureya eventually gives an affirmative answer requesting a daughter of Tushratta. The making of the alliance is thus the sending of a princess and a large bride price reciprocated by gold and presents. In EA 19, Tushratta accepts the marriage proposal, thus the marriage alliance between the two kingdoms. His request for gold, made through his messenger Keliya, is received favorably, and Nimmureya sends a small quantity of gold. Nevertheless, Tushratta requests more gold as Tadu-Heba's bride price, to be used for the mausoleum he wants to build in memory of his grandfather Artatama.

Tushratta's goal is to obtain more gold from the pharaoh than his father, Shutarna, received. If Nimmureya accedes to this request, this could serve Tushratta's aim of demonstrating that the friendship Nimmureya shows to the Mittani kingdom under his rule is greater than that in his father's time. A request for an increased amount of gold could also indicate that the price for the Mittani support is higher than before. EA 20 indicates that gold sent by Nimmureya indeed serves Tushratta's objective of showing off his influence in front of the Mittani elite and foreign guests. EA 24 reveals that Tushratta would also like Nimmureya to show off by displaying his daughter's dowry to all the nobles and foreign guests. In this letter, Tushratta requests a golden image of his daughter, Tadu-Heba (Moran, 1992: 68).

This set of exchanges has symbolic value in a larger game of jockeying for status between the powerful leaders of these kingdoms. Like the other Middle Eastern rulers of this period, Tushratta measures his status in terms of gifts received from the Egyptian pharaoh. For such gifts, Tushratta and the other rulers are willing to pay a high price—giving their daughters in marriage. In this transaction, Tushratta succeeds in achieving his goal. (For more on the social-psychological aspects of these exchanges, see Druckman and Güner, forthcoming.)

Tushratta's Letters to Teye and Naphurreya

EA 26 was sent from Tushratta to Teye, Nimmureya's widow. It is a complaint about the solid-gold statues representing Tushratta and his daughter Tadu-Heba. The solid-gold statues are not sent by Teye or by her son Naphurreya, the new pharaoh. Instead, Naphurreya sends gold-plated wooden statues. Tushratta asks Teye to talk with her son and inform him about the cooperation that existed between Tushratta

and Naphurreya's father. He presumably thinks that Naphurreya will then send the promised statues.

Tushratta relies not only on Nimmureya's promise, but also on Teye's demand that Egypt–Mittani relations should continue unchanged after the death of her husband. Naphurreya was indeed known to be under his mother's influence (Roux, 1992: 258). Tushratta's supposition is that when Naphurreya realizes just how close he was with Nimmureya, Naphurreya will change his attitude.

In EA 27, Tushratta insists on the promised statues. He writes that Nimmureya should cast the promised statues in front of Mittani messengers and send four sacks of gold to him. He sends his messenger to Naphurreya and informs Naphurreya that he will let Mane, Nimmureya's envoy, return to Egypt once his messenger comes back from there. This is an indication of Tushratta's preferences for reciprocal exchanges. However, while waiting for his messengers, Tushratta is only informed of Naphurreya's refusal to send Tushratta's messengers back to Mittani. He then sends EA 28 in protest, repeating that he will keep Mane unless his messengers are set free.

Whether Naphurreya's behavior is due to Tushratta's detention of Mane is uncertain: Naphurreya could be retaliating against Mane's detention. His behavior could indicate that he values the Mittani alliance less than his father did, as he has a penchant for religious more than for political values. As for Tushratta, his insistence can be understood in terms of his strong need for Egyptian support for his own political objectives.

Tushratta writes that Artatama, his grandfather, gave a daughter only after the seventh request from Thutmose IV, and that Shutarna, his father, gave a daughter to Nimmureya only after the fifth or the sixth request, but that he gave a daughter to Nimmureya at once upon Nimmureya's request (EA 29). This is a nice illustration of how Mittani rulers became more accepting of Egyptian proposals and renewals of marriage alliances over time. Did this indicate an increasing friendship between the two kingdoms or an increasing Mittani dependence on Egypt? Tushratta hints that exchanges of gifts and cooperation between the two kingdoms will seal their alliance in the eyes of other kingdoms.

Tushratta is again assuming that nothing will change or even that the alliance will become more solid each time a new ruler comes to power. Promises will always be honored. In other words, neither king should defect once mutual cooperation is formally arranged, according to him.

Tushratta not only complains about the golden statues but retaliates by sending Keliya, his usual messenger, and keeping Mane as well. It is interesting that Keliya and Mane are the messengers who brought the gold-plated wooden statues from Egypt. Messengers run great risks, as shown in this example and in Naphurreya's detention of two Mittani messengers. Naphurreya claimed that Asali and Artasuba committed crimes in Egypt related to Naphurreya's religious reform of having one Sun God only. Some actions of the Mittani messengers might have been perceived by the angered pharaoh as being directed against the reform.

Tushratta, perplexed by the pharaoh's not sending the golden statues, still tries to convince him by invoking the past alliance between the two kingdoms and the history of cooperation between him and Nimmureya, the pharaoh's father. His real

objective could be to solidify his own position among the Mittani elite by displaying the statues as proof of Egyptian support. But the pharaoh remains aloof, either out of sheer lack of interest in courting Mittani cooperation, since he is busy with religious reforms, or because he underestimates the value of a Mittani partnership. The second possibility gains weight when we realize that the pharaoh could have sent nothing. Instead he sends wooden statues, constituting an indication of his, perhaps limited, appreciation of the Egyptian–Mitanni alliance.

ANALYTICAL COMMENTS

The story of the gold statues is one of the rare examples of actual interactions between Egypt and another kingdom. Normally, pharaohs did not even react or reply to other rulers. Tushratta's insistence on gold statues displays how a ruler during the Amarna period evaluated mutual cooperation between two kingdoms and his expectations about the future. These expectations were built on the basis of the past. The history of friendship was perceived as a sufficient condition for the continuation of the alliance. Such an expectation may today be seen as quite naive. There is always a possibility of unilateral defection when ongoing interactions are based on a weak norm of reciprocity or a lack of mutual dependence (Druckman, 1990). Moreover, Tushratta tries to evoke an image of progressively cooperative Egyptian–Mitanni relations. At the end, Tushratta painfully learns that promises are not always honored.

The larger story of the period is chronicled through a compendium of more than 300 letters presented in Moran (1992). It is a story dominated by attempts by the leaders of the various kingdoms to gain favor with the hegemon, Egypt. Many of their efforts were in vain owing to a lineup of unresponsive and seemingly uninterested pharaohs. But it is also a story of misperceptions, unreceived communications, and opaque intentions. Were these psychological factors not also characteristic of modern international relations, we would be tempted to blame them on the transportation vehicles and communication technologies of that period!

Special thanks to Mieko Fujioka for her help in putting this piece together.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

This is a case of negotiation with a failure at the end for Tushratta. The security point of the pharaoh has risen throughout the years, owing to an evolution of the regional context. He no longer needs or cares about Mitanni support.

Tushratta resorts to fairness principles to maintain the alliance—equality and implementation of a former commitment—hoping in this way to compensate for a rather asymmetrical situation. For this purpose, he even creates a double hostage situation with the messengers. This last attempt does not help him to obtain what he strives for.

The alliance issue is clearly expressed through the exchange of symbolic values such as princesses or gold statues.