

THE TOWN OF MUŠIḤUNA AND THE CITIES OF THE “BEQA’ ALLIANCE” IN THE AMARNA LETTERS*

Juan-Pablo Vita

1. The town of Mušihuna is mentioned three times in the Amarna corpus, in letters EA 182, 183 and 184¹. All of them were sent by king Šutarna of Mušihuna. It is a small corpus that provides little information from a historical point of view: only the heading of the message is preserved from EA 183 and 184 and in EA 182 Šutarna requests the pharaoh to send a garrison².

2. As Goren, Finkelstein and Naʿaman sum up (2004, 172), the location of the town of Mušihuna is unknown: «city of unknown location. It is commonly identified with *Mšḥ* of Thutmose III’s topographical list (No. 25), which is mentioned side by side with well identified cities of the Bashan». The possible relationship between Mušihuna and the town known as *Mšḥ* in the topographical list of Thutmose III has also been pointed out by various authors, for example Röllig (1995): «Aufgrund der Verbindung mit ägypt. *mšḥ* in der Liste Thutmosis III. (Simons, Lists I 25) sucht man den Ort südl. von Damaskus im Bereich des Ġabal Drüz (vgl. *wādī mušahḥa*)»; Liverani (1998, 249 n. 19): «Mushihuna è da identificare con la *mu-si-ḥu* della lista di Tuthmosi III, dove è associata a Tubu, Bashan, Qanu, Ashtartu»; Belmonte (2001, 201): «Ort in der Nähe des Ġabal al-Drüz ... Evtl. eine Ortschaft nördlich von Izraʿ (-> Širibašani) nach Bunnens - Kuschke - Röllig (1990) ... Vgl. äg. *Mšḥ*»³; regarding this, see already the observations of Sayce (1894, 36: «Musikhuni is probably the city of Masakh mentioned by Thotmes III at Karnak among the towns of northern Palestine») and Dhorme (1908, 519: «C’est encore

* This article is a result of the Research Project “Lenguas y dialectos en la Siria-Palestina del Bronce Final. Nuevas bases para el estudio del substrato semítico-noroccidental en la correspondencia de El-Amarna (s. XIV a. C.)” funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia within the National Plan for Scientific Research, Development and Technological Innovation (I+D+I) (BFF2003-03883) and by the European Union (Feder Funds). It has also received financial support from the “Hiberus” Group of Excellence (Government of Aragón, Spain: see <http://fyl.unizar.es/HAn/hiberus/hiberusintro.html>). The final results of the project will be published in an appropriately illustrated monography.

1 EA 182:2 y EA 183:4: ^{mu}*Mu-si-ḥu-na*; EA 184:4: ^{mu}*Mu-si-ḥu-ni*.

2 Liverani (1998, 249) also attributes to Šutarna from Mušihuna letters EA 180 and 181. This possibility will be considered in the monography abovementioned in n.1.

3 See also Moran (1992, 391): «town south of Damascus»; Helck (1971, 184 n. 102): «Steht in der Thutmosis III. - Liste als Nr. 25 zwischen Ziribašani und Kani, lag also in der Nähe des Gebel Drus».

non loin de *Qânâ* qu'il faut, selon nous, placer la ville de *Mu-ši-ḥu-na* ..., en l'identifiant avec *Ma-sa-ḥa* qui précède *Qânô* dans la liste de Thoutmosis III (n° 25)»).

3. The most general opinion, therefore, suggests that the location of Mušihuna would be in the area of Bashan, south of Damascus, and that is where it is situated on the map made by Bunnens, Kuschke and Röllig (1990: Map B III 3). The question of the possible location of this town must, however, take into account the following observations.

4. Knudtzon pointed out in his edition of the Amarna corpus the palaeographical similarity of letters EA 182 and 183 to the group of letters EA 174-181, from various kings and towns of the Beqa^c. According to Knudtzon (1907-1915, 1278 n. 1): «Nr. 177-183 sind nach Schrift und Ton kaum von den drei vorhergehenden [= EA 174-176] zu trennen ... der Schrifttypus scheint auf allen ganz derselbe zu sein», and he adds the following remarks: «Ausserdem ist die Form der Nummern 174 und 182 auffällig ähnlich und *e-ri-ub* 180,14 mit *a-li-uk* in Nr. 174-176 zu vergleichen. Bezüglich der Schrift ist besonders darauf aufmerksam zu machen, dass in *a-na* das *a* wie 2 aussieht». Elsewhere, Knudtzon (1907-1915, 57) insists on the physical and palaeographical similarity of the Šutarna letters to the group EA 174-176: «Namiawaza [=Biryawaza], von dem Nr. 194-197 herrühren, ist Sohn eines Šutarna (194,9), der mit dem Absender der Briefe Nr. 182-184, dem Šutarna von Mušihuna, identisch sein wird, da dessen Briefe nach Schrift, Ton und zum Teil sogar Form Nr. 174-176 ähnlich sind. Aus diesem Grund habe ich die Briefe Šutarnas von Mušihuna von denen seines vermutlichen Sohnes Namiawaza [=Biryawaza] getrennt»⁴. However, letter EA 184 seems to be slightly different palaeographically from EA 182 and 183, as Knudtzon points out (1907-1915, 1281 n. 2): «Nr. 184 weicht in bezug auf Schrift etwas von den 2 vorhergehenden Briefen [= EA 182 y 183], welche denselben Absender haben, ab. Es handelt sich hauptsächlich um *a-na*, *En* und *alu*».

From Knudtzon's observations it can be concluded, on the one hand, that EA 182 and 183 could be the work of the same scribe, whereas EA 184 would have been written by another scribe; on the other hand, that at least EA 182 and 183 are closely linked from a palaeographical point of view with the Beqa^c letters. The petrographic analysis carried out by Goren, Finkelstein and Na'aman (2004, 172 y 173) highlight some of these aspects: the geological composition in EA 182 and 183 is identical and in both cases «a source area in the Bashan is highly unlikely», «unlikely that they were written in the Bashan». The geological composition of EA 184, however, «is different from EA 182-183 ... However, there are no other details that may help in the definition of its ... origin» (Goren - Finkelstein - Na'aman 2004, 173)»⁵.

5. As stated above, Knudtzon believes letters EA 174, 175 and 176 to be the work of the same scribe; EA 363 should be included in this group, as other authors have

⁴ Weber (1915, 1280) includes these observations.

⁵ «Knudtzon (1915:1281) noted that EA 184 is different in script from EA 182-183, an observation now supported by the petrographic analysis» (Goren - Finkelstein - Na'aman 2004, 173).

concluded⁶. From our side, we have had the opportunity to ascertain directly the palaeographical unity of the four letters⁷. They are, therefore, letters written by the same scribe but sent to Egypt on behalf of four kings: Bieri of Ḥašabu (EA 174), Ili-daya of Ḥazi (EA 175), ‘Abdi-Riša of ‘Enu-Šāsî (EA 363) and a king whose name is not preserved, ruling a town unspecified in the message (EA 176). The four letters present an identical message addressed to the pharaoh, a message written basically in the same terms⁸ asking Egypt for help against the advance of Itaggama of Qadeš, allied to the Hittite invaders; they make up what Campbell (1964, 135) rightly called the “Beqa‘ Alliance”. The letters are, without a doubt, strictly contemporaneous (end of the reign of Akhenaten, cf. Campbell 1964, 123 and 135; Liverani 1998, 259)⁹.

6. From our collation of the Amarna letters kept at the *Vorderasiatisches Museum* of Berlin¹⁰ it can be concluded that EA 182 is the letter from Mušihuna that has the clearest material and palaeographical relationship with the four letters from the Beqa‘ EA 174-176 and 363; in this respect, see the examples of palaeographical comparison between EA 182 and EA 363 that are produced in pl. 1¹¹.

The relationship between EA 182 and the letters of the “Beqa‘ Alliance” can also be seen in their contents. The kings of the Beqa‘ specify that «we are in ‘Amqu, (and we are) cities of the king, my lord» (*ni-i₁₅-nu i₁₅-ba-ša-nu a-na kur Am-qi uru^{dihi.ha} lugal en-ia*; cf. Liverani 1998, 259); that is, against Itaggama’s attack, the four rulers are together somewhere in ‘Amqu in the Lebanese Beqa‘ (cf. Belmonte 2001a, 21), from where they request the help of the pharaoh. At the end of EA 182 (line 11), Šutarna also addresses the pharaoh in plural: «so that we may hold (*ni-leq-<qé>*, cf. Moran 1992, 264) the cities of the king, my lord»; this declaration seems to repeat a collective request for help. Both the contents and the palaeography, seem to connect directly letter EA 182 with the letters of the “Beqa‘ Alliance”, that is, the town of Mušihuna with the Lebanese Beqa‘. EA 174-176, EA 363 and EA 182 must be contemporaneous, maybe written at the same time by the same scribe and as an answer to a common danger threatening the area.

7. Therefore, it can be questioned whether the commonly suggested identification of Mušihuna as the town known as *Mšh* in the topographical list of Thutmose III is correct. Goren, Finkelstein and Na’aman (2004, 173) raise directly this issue: «Should we then dismiss the equation of Mushihuna with *Mšh* (No. 25) of Thutmose III’s topographical

⁶ See, for example, Liverani (1998, 259): «Quattro lettere virtualmente identiche ... senza dubbio scritte da uno stesso scriba nella stessa occasione».

⁷ We would especially like to thank B. André-Salvini (*Musée du Louvre*) and C.B.F. Walker (*British Museum*) for permission to study the Amarna letters kept in their museums, as well as for the help given during our research stay, in both cases in 2004.

⁸ See the presentation of the letters in Weippert (1970, 268).

⁹ On the grammar of the letters of the Beqa‘, see in general van der Westhuizen (1991; 1992; 2000).

¹⁰ See, for example, Vita (1999) and Marzahn - Vita (2003).

¹¹ We thank the *Vorderasiatisches Museum* and the *Musée du Louvre* for permission to publish these photographs.

list and locate the city elsewhere?». Their answer is not, initially, conclusive: «we avoid suggesting identification for Mušihuna and for the origin of its three letters». However, they explore yet another option: accepting that Mušihuna was situated in the area of Bashan, it could be possible that «Šutarna sent his letters from the Egyptian centre at Kumidi» (Goren - Finkelstein - Naʿaman 2004, 173); they also suggest (*ibid.*) the possibility that EA 184 came directly from Mušihuna, whereas EA 182 and 183 could have been sent from Kumidi.

8. In principle, it cannot be ruled out the possibility that Mušihuna was a town situated in the Bashan and that its king Šutarna sent his letters, or at least some of them (such as, perhaps, EA 182 and 183), from Kumidi. However, we may presume that Šutarna would have, in principle, the services of a scribe for the administration of his own kingdom, a scribe who would be able to write his own letters. But in the event that Šutarna needed to require, for various reasons, the services of scribes from other towns, it seems rather difficult to explain why, if Mušihuna were in fact situated South of Damascus, Šutarna would have to use the services from a scribe from Kumidi in order to communicate with the pharaoh. It is much more likely that in that case Mušihuna would be under the direct political influence of Damascus and that such political situation was reflected on the palaeography of some of its letters, as in the case of the letters from the towns of Širi-Bašāni (EA 201), Šasʿīmu (EA 203), Qanû (EA 204), Tūbu (EA 205) and Našiba (EA 206), all of them in the area of Bashan, in connection with the letter from Damascus EA 195. However, EA 182 and 183 (from Mušihuna) and EA 194 and 196 (from Damascus) are the work of different scribes¹².

9. Therefore, there seem to be enough palaeographic, petrographic and content evidence to suggest that the equivalence Mušihuna = *Mšh* is not correct and that, in any event, Mušihuna was not located in the area of Bashan. The location of Mušihuna should be placed, in our opinion, in the Beqaʿ; Goren, Finkelstein and Naʿaman state a similar opinion in another part of their work (2004, 133: «which [=Mušihuna] can therefore be identified in the area between Damascus and the Lebanese Beqaʿ»), despite the doubts that they produced in the aforementioned quotes sub § 7. But this new location of Mušihuna does not imply, in our opinion, that the letters of Šutarna were necessarily written and sent from Kumidi. The kings of the towns belonging to the “Beqaʿ Alliance”, where we believe Mušihuna could be included, could have got together in one of those towns (Hašabu, Ĥazi, ʿEnu-Šāsī, Mušihuna, etc.; cf. above sub § 5) in order to lay out the appropriate strategy against an external danger that threatened the region and request the help of the pharaoh; the scribe of the town where such a meeting took place would have been the author of, at least, letters EA 174, 175, 176, 363, 182 and 183. It would be a similar procedure to that used, for example, in letters EA 201-206, of the area of Bashan (cf. § 8).

¹² All the palaeographical observations stated in this paragraph will be duly proved in the monography mentioned in n.1.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Belmonte 2001

J. A. Belmonte, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der Texte aus Syrien im 2. Jt. v. Chr.*, TAVO 12/2, Wiesbaden 2001.

Bunnens - Kuschke - Röllig 1990

G. Bunnens - A. Kuschke - W. Röllig, "Palästina und Syrien zur Zeit der ägyptischen-hethitischen Vorherrschaft", in TAVO *Karten B III* 3, Wiesbaden 1990.

Campbell 1964

E.F. Campbell, Jr., *The Chronology of the Amarna Letters. With Special Reference to the Hypothetical Coregency of Amenophis III and Akhenaten*, Baltimore 1964.

Dhorme 1908

E. Dhorme, "Les pays bibliques au temps d'El-Amarna d'après la nouvelle publication des lettres", *RB* 5, 1908, pp. 500-519.

Goren - Finkelstein - Na'aman 2004

Y. Goren - I. Finkelstein - N. Na'aman, *Inscribed in Clay. Provenance Study of the Amarna Tablets and Other Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Tel Aviv 2004.

Helck 1971

W. Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Wiesbaden 1971.

Knudtzon 1907-1915

J.A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, Leipzig 1907-1915 (2 vols.; Aalen 1964).

Liverani 1998

M. Liverani, *Le lettere di el-Amarna. Vol. 1. Le lettere dei "Piccoli Re". Vol. 2. Le lettere dei "Grandi Re"*, Brescia 1998.

Marzahn - Vita 2003

J. Marzahn - J.-P. Vita, "Las Cartas de El-Amarna en el Vorderasiatisches Museum de Berlín", Madrid 2003: <http://amarna.iejop.csic.es> (web in Spanish, English and German).

Moran 1992

W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, Baltimore - London 1992.

Röllig 1995

W. Röllig, "Mušihuna", *RIA* 8, 1995, pp. 462-463.

Sayce 1894

A.H. Sayce, "The Cuneiform Tablets", in W.M.F. Petrie, *Tell El Amarna*, London 1894, 34-37, Pls. XXXI-XXXIII.

Vita 1999

J.-P. Vita. "Kollationen zu Berliner Amarnabriefen", in B. Böck - E. Cancik-Kirschbaum - Th. Richter (eds.), *Munuscula Mesopotamica - Festschrift für J. Renger* (AOAT 267), Münster 1999, pp. 617-622.

Weber 1915

O. Weber, "Anmerkungen", in J.A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, Leipzig 1907-1915 (Aalen 1964), vol. 2, pp. 1009-1357.

Weippert 1970

M. Weippert, "Die Nomadenquelle. Ein Beitrag zur Topographie der *Biqā'* im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.", in A. Kuschke - E. Kutsch (eds.), *Archäologie und Altes Testament. Festschrift für Kurt Galling*, Tübingen 1970, pp. 267-272.

van der Westhuizen 1991




J.P. van der Westhuizen. "Morphology and Morphosyntax of the Verb in the Amqi Amarna Letters", *JS* 3, 1991, pp. 54-84.



van der Westhuizen 1992



J.P. van der Westhuizen, "Verbless Sentences in the Amqi Amarna Letters", *JS* 4, 1992, pp. 117-129.

van der Westhuizen 2000

J.P. van der Westhuizen, "**Morphology** and Morphosyntax of the Adjective as also Attributive and Predicative Constructions in the Amqi Amarna Letters", in K. van Lerberghe - G. Voet (eds.), *Languages and Cultures in Contact*, Leuven 2000 (OLA 96), pp. 447-459.

<i>lugal en-ia</i>	
EA 182:4	
EA 363:16.23	
	

<i>7 ù 7 am-qi-ut</i>	
EA 182:5	
EA 363:6	

<i>a-na</i>	
EA 182:3.7.15	
EA 363:8.11.22	



<i>gir</i>	
EA 182:3	
EA 363:5	

Plate 1