

The Amarna Period and its Place in the History of Globalization - Dr Federico Zangani

At the beginning of July we welcomed Dr Federico Zangani from the MacDonald Institute at Cambridge University where he is working on his project "Globalization, Citizens, and Society in Antiquity: A Comparative Study of Egypt and Ugarit".

Frederico started his lecture with pointing out how an awareness of contemporary globalisation has included the ancient world. Susan Sherratt's 2003 article, "The Mediterranean Economy: 'Globalization' at the End of the Second Millennium B.C.E." drew readers' attention to the way trade networks created interconnectedness between various Mediterranean civilisations. In 2016 Helle Vandkilde's "Bronzization: The Bronze Age as pre-Modern Globalization" stressed the way metals created interconnectivity between civilisations. The way that objects travel from their places of origin shows this process. Frederico gave examples of Baltic amber found in Palestine and Syria and Cornish tin found in the Levant.

Frederico then focussed on the links between Amenhotep III and places in the Aegean which occur at his mortuary temple: Aegean place names appear at the base of statues. They suggest stops on a journey and plaques with Amenhotep's cartouche have been found at Mycenae. After surveying the changes of the reign of Akhenaten, Frederico pointed out the imports used in the mask of Tutankhamun: gold from Nubia and lapis lazuli from Afghanistan.

Ideas about ancient Egypt as a nation/territorial state developed in the nineteenth century Europe when being or becoming a nation state was an important idea but it may be misleading to view the past solely through the lens of the present. Global cities might have been more important than clearly defined territorial states. A good example of a contemporary global city would be London which seems to have an identity of its own, separate from the rest of the United Kingdom. Such cities are where the work of globalisation takes place. An example from the ancient past would be Ugarit on the modern-day Syrian coast.

Mycenaean ceramic imported to Ugarit, 14th–13th century BC

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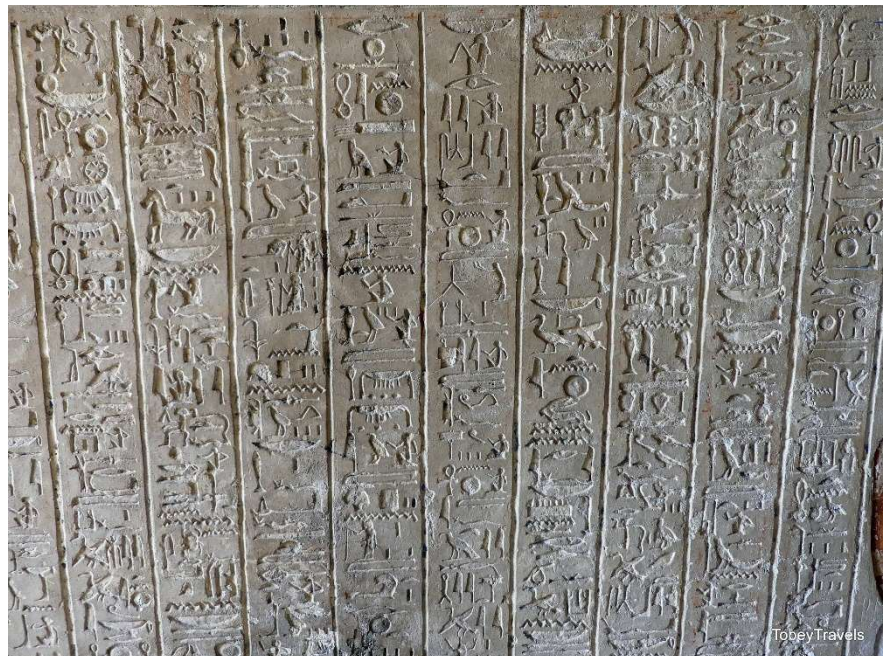


Such cities have connectivity, wealth, human capital, knowledge and culture. Thutmose III and Amenhotep II both conducted campaigns northwards into modern day Syria but they were not seeking to increase Egypt's territory, rather to acquire cities and corridors for trade,

Amenhotep III's Amarna letters are more concerned with diplomacy than imperialism. He is corresponding with the great kings of Babylon, Mitani and Hattusa, sometimes on a personal level ('come, drink and eat with me'), in order to foster connections and trade. Amarna can be seen as a global city, receiving goods from other areas. There are other clues to global links: Egyptian faience grapes have been found in Ugarit; carvings from Amarna show soldiers wearing Mycenaean helmets suggesting the possibility of Mycenaean mercenaries fighting at Amarna and the version of the Great Hymn to the Aten in the tomb of Ay at Amarna contains the statement that the Aten is a god for all nations not just Egypt.

The Great Hymn to the Aten in the tomb of Ay at Amarna

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John Wilson in his 1951 book, *Culture of Ancient Egypt*, interpreted the foundation of Amarna as a reaction to the conservative and inward-looking priests of Thebes: Akhenaten wished to open Egypt up to the world and create connections with other cities.

Language also plays a role. At Amarna the vernacular, spoken Late Egyptian language was elevated to official use in royal inscriptions which can be seen as another way in which the city was asserting its cultural and political independence. The tomb of Neferhotep (TT49) is a good example of someone negotiating such changes. He was a chief scribe of Amun during the reigns of Tutankhamun, Ay and Horemheb. Part of the inscriptions in the tomb are in Middle Egyptian but some are in Late Egyptian.