



# “I Passed over Difficult Mountains”

Studies on the Ancient Near East  
in Honor of Mario Liverani

Edited by Francesco Di Filippo,  
Lucio Milano and Lucia Mori

dubsar 28

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Mario Liverani at work in the archaeological site of Arslantepe, South-Eastern Turkey.  
(Photo by Roberto Ceccacci)





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# **The Materiality of the Cuneiform Tablets and the Puzzle of the Hittite Historical Geography**

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Archaeometric analyses on the cuneiform tablets are a new and very productive research field. Physical analysis (Petrography) and chemical investigations (Instrumental Neutron Activation Analyses) had already been experimented in the seventies of last century,<sup>1</sup> but they have become more frequent, when portable X-Ray fluorescence analysers started to be used; in fact, this apparatus has the advantage that it can be easily carried to any place where the cuneiform tablets are preserved and does not require any destructive process.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, the chemical analyses rely on comparative databases, which unfortunately are not available for all the regions of the ancient Near East. Moreover, the results of said analyses are fully reliable, only when many tablets can be examined.<sup>3</sup>

The most significant results reached by the scientific team led by Y. Goren concern the analysis on the cuneiform tablets originally preserved in the archives of Akhetaten (Tell el Amarna). The outcome of this research appeared in several publications and offered important elements for the identification of the places where the tablets might have been written.<sup>4</sup>

Y. Goren and his collaborators recently examined 81 cuneiform tablets found at Ḫattuša and Tell el Amarna using the portable X-Ray fluorescence analysers in order to determine regional differences in the clay of these documents. According to the results of this research, the analysed tablets could be divided into five groups, corresponding to different geo-political regions, namely Ugarit, Mittani, Babylonia, Ḫattuša and Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

An American and Japanese team conducted chemical analyses on a large group of cuneiform tablets, which are part of, respectively, the British Museum

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<sup>1</sup> See the first analyses of this kind, Artzy et al. 1976; Dobel et al. 1977.

<sup>2</sup> See Goren et al. 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Goren et al. 2004, 14–15.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Goren et al. 2003; Cohen-Weinberger / Goren 2004; Goren et al. 2003; Goren et al. 2004; Goren et al. 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Goren et al. 2011.

and the Yale University collection. The researchers concentrated their work on tablets, which come from Mesopotamia and central Turkey, aiming at discovering regional differences in the chemical composition of the texts produced in these territories. E. Uchida, D. Niikuma and R. Watanabe (2015) used portable X-Ray fluorescence analysers and examined 634 cuneiform tablets, bullae and seals. They classified the analysed tablets into groups that refer to four regions of the Near East, namely the upper stream area of the Tigris and Euphrates river, the lower stream area of the Tigris and Euphrates river, the northern and central areas in Turkey, and its southern area.

Although these results seem to coincide with those reached by Y. Goren and his team, at least concerning the macro-areas from which the studied tablets came, E. Uchida, D. Niikuma and T. Watanabe (2015, 187) argued that the two teams conducted the calibration of the portable X-Ray fluorescence in a different way. Hence, the concentration of elements, such as for example copper, titanium and calcium, is much higher in their analysis than in that conducted by Y. Goren. Since the calibration is an important component for the reliability of the results, Uchida, Niikuma and Watanabe concisely concluded their publication by stating that “the results obtained in Goren et al. (2011) are not correct because the pXRF was not calibrated using standard materials”.

Philologists, who have no familiarity with chemistry and physics and can only trust the results of scientific analyses, may be disconcerted by said statement that will undermine their need for an objective truth.

Another field of research that is often at the centre of debate is the historical geography of the ancient Near East. Concerning Anatolia, the recently published book *Hittite Landscape and Geography*, edited by M. Weeden and L.Z. Ullmann (2017), gives an exhaustive treatment of all the available data on the historical geography of ancient Anatolia and is an indispensable tool for hittitologists, notwithstanding there are questions, which remain without any sure answers.

Thus, it is understandable that new difficulties arise, when one attempts to solve historical and geographical problems by means of the archeometric analysis on the clay of cuneiform tablets. This is the case of the location of the region of Arzawa and of the cities of Milawanda and Apaša, in western Anatolia.

The place name Milawa(n)da, though only mentioned in three Hittite documents, has been for a long time at the centre of the scientific debate. E. Forrer (1924, 5) assumed that Milawa(n)da corresponded to the classical Milyas, whereas B. Hrozný (1929, 329) argued that said city was located where Miletus was.

The identification with Milyas can be excluded, because Milawan(d)a was an important harbour and a mercantile hub, which difficultly could be located along the rocky coast of Lycia. Moreover, the Yalburt inscription offers a description of said region and does not mention Milawanda.<sup>6</sup>

Instead, the identification of Milawa(n)da with Miletus was accepted on a

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<sup>6</sup> Gander 2017a, 268–269.

linguistic ground<sup>7</sup> and is supported by the archaeological evidence, as well; in fact, Hittite texts document that Milawa(n)da was, at least for a certain period, politically tied to Ahḫiyawa and the excavations of the Late Bronze Age levels at Miletus indicate a significant Mycenaean presence at this site.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, J.D. Hawkins (1998, 26) argued that the itinerary to Milawa(n)da, as described in the so called “Tawalaga Letter”, confirms the aforementioned assumption.

The Comprehensive Annals written by Muršili II relate that he reached Milawa(n)da before having defeated the ruler of Arzawa;<sup>9</sup> thus, those researchers who do not share the identification of Milawa(n)da with Miletus state that the Hittite king could not have arrived at Miletus before he conquered the whole territory of Arzawa, and, consequently, Milawa(n)da should be searched in a more southern region.<sup>10</sup> This objection is, in my opinion, not relevant; in fact, the ruler of Arzawa might have no more controlled the whole Meander region, although it was very close to the core of his kingdom, when the Hittite king moved against him.

The aforementioned “Tawagalawa Letter” is the draft of a letter to be delivered to the King of Ahḫiyawa.<sup>11</sup> Only the third tablet of this long letter written in Hittite has been preserved, and its main topic is the refuge that the ruler of Ahḫiyawa granted to Piyamaradu. The latter personage was a member of the royal family of Arzawa, who received hospitality at the court of Ahḫiyawa and raided western Anatolian territories under the Hittite control. Though the first and second tablets are not preserved and, thus, the *incipit* is also lost, most researchers argue that Ḫattušili III is the author of this letter.<sup>12</sup>

The letter was written when the Hittite king was in Milawa(n)da;<sup>13</sup> hence, this document seemed to be particularly interesting to Y. Goren, who analysed the clay the tablet. Optical mineralogical investigations demonstrate that the fabric of this tablet presents similarities to the Samian pottery; moreover, instrumental neutron activation analysis concurs “with reference material from the Eastern Aegean costal area south of Ephesus”. These results “fit very well with the text itself” and support the assumption that the tablet of the “Tawagalawa Letter” was actually produced at Miletus,<sup>14</sup> thus, hopefully, winning the resistance of those researchers, who are still reluctant to accept the localisation of Milawa(n)da at Miletus.

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<sup>7</sup> See D. Hawkins (1998, 30–31 n. 207), who refers to the statement of A. Morpurgo Davies.

<sup>8</sup> Niemeier 1998; Günel 2017, 119–120.

<sup>9</sup> Del Monte 1993, 77–78.

<sup>10</sup> See Gander 2017, 268, with previous literature.

<sup>11</sup> Beckman et al. 2011, 101–122. See now Heinhold-Krahmer / Rieken 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Beckman et al. 2011, 119–120.

<sup>13</sup> De Martino 2010; see Taracha 2015 for a different point of view.

<sup>14</sup> Goren et al. 2011, 693–694; Gander 2017a, 269.

The question concerning location of the city of Apaša is more complicated. Uḫḫa-ziti ruler of Arzawa resided in Apaša, when the Hittite king Muršili II marched with his army against him, as the Annals of Muršili II document,<sup>15</sup> hence, Apaša may have been the royal residence. The identification of Apaša with the classical city of Ephesus was supported by the assumption that the core of Arzawa presumably corresponded to the fertile and well-connected region of the Meander valley and its capital was on the nearby coast.<sup>16</sup>

Archaeological investigations in the Bronze Age levels at Ephesus and Ayasoluk, which is at about 5 km far from Ephesus, demonstrate that there was a settlement there at that time.<sup>17</sup>

The location of Apaša at Ayasoluk/Ephesus is shared by those researchers who accept the reconstruction of the historical geography of western Anatolia that is generally proposed. In fact, the three countries, which Muršili II created after having defeated Arzawa, namely the Šeḫa River Land, the country of Mira and the country of Ḫapalla, may be located, respectively and from north to south, into the valley of the river Hermos, into the valley of the Meander river and in the region laying between Mira and Ḫatti. The recent interpretation of the Hieroglyphic inscriptions on the Karabel relief supports the hypothesis that said monument marked the northern border of Mira and the road connection into the Šeḫa River Land.<sup>18</sup>

Hittite sources also suggest that the polity of Wiluša should be at the north of the Šeḫa River Land and close to it. The equation of the Hittite place name Wiluša with the Greek Ilios is now generally accepted;<sup>19</sup> despite this, the assumption of identifying the site of Hisarlık Höyük with the Wiluša/Ilios/Troy remains at the centre of a stormy scientific debate.<sup>20</sup> After the publication of M. Korfmann's archaeological results and the catalogue of the exhibition *Troia Traum und Wirklichkeit* (2001) some researchers contested the interpretation of the ruins of Hisarlık Höyük/Troy VI, as those of an important city and trade hub, arguing that "Korfmann has not even proved that late Troy was a city at all".<sup>21</sup> A complete different point of view was expressed by other archaeologists and philologists,<sup>22</sup> who shared the proposed identification of Wiluša with Hisarlık Höyük by means of the Hittite textual evidence and the archaeological data.<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding, S. Heinhold-Krahmer contested said assumption and proposed a location of Wiluša

<sup>15</sup> Del Monte 1993, 22, 79; Beckman et al. 2011, 15, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Hawkins 1998, 1. For a different location of Apaša, see Freu 1998, 115–116.

<sup>17</sup> Niemeier 1998, 41–42; Büyükkolancı 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Hawkins 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Hajnal 2003; 2011.

<sup>20</sup> See the proceedings of the Conference edited by Christoph Ulf (2003).

<sup>21</sup> Hertel / Kolb 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Easton et al. 2002; Jablonka / Rose 2004.

<sup>23</sup> See also the literature quoted by Beckman et al. 2011, 132.

in south western Anatolia (2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2013), which, instead, can be hardly accepted in consideration of our knowledge of the geography of this part of the Hittite kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

M. Gander (2017a; 2017b), following Heinhold-Krahmer, recently challenged the aforementioned traditional geographical reconstruction of Western Anatolia and proposed that Wiluša may be either in the coastal region in front of the island of Lesbos, or south of Miletus; moreover, Arzawa corresponded to the classical Lydia and the Šeḫa River Land was located in the Meander valley. Gander tried to support his alternative reconstruction of Western Anatolian geography recurring to the results of the archaeometric analysis on the clay of the tablet EA 32.

This tablet preserves a letter sent by the Arzawean king Tarḫundaradu to Amenhotep III (EA 32) and deals with the marriage between a daughter of the Arzawean king to the Pharaoh.<sup>25</sup>

Y. Goren analysed the clay of the letter EA 32. Although the results of these analysis were compared to the composition of a huge amount of pottery consulting the whole Bonn data bank, “no sample with an exactly similar composition was found and therefore the paste of the tablet was not used to produce any of the pottery samples measured. However, many samples of a western Anatolian group with not very different elemental abundances were filtered out by search (and only these). It turned out that the tablet has a composition which is closely associated to a group of samples which was published as group ‘G’” (Goren et al. 2004, 46–47).

Y. Goren, I. Finkelstein and D. Na’aman assumed that the pottery of the group ‘G’ may be assigned to workshops in Ephesus. Instead, M. Kerschner (2002) recently contested the result of Goren’s analysis and stated that the clay of the letter EA 32 is only comparable to that of the pottery produced in the region of classical Lydia, near Kyme.

M. Gander (2017a; 2017b, 270) trusted Kerschner’s results and, consequently, concluded that “at least at the time of Tarḫundaradu, the capital of Arzawa was not at Ephesus but north of it, in classical Lydia”; thus, this statement could confirm Gander’s assumption that Apaša may be located in Lydia and his new presentation of the historical geography of western Anatolia.

Though M. Gander deserves the merit of having given the opportunity for an up-to-date and productive scientific debate on the geography of western Anatolia, conclusive evidence, however, has not yet been adduced to prove his point. In fact, firstly, we have only one tablet at our disposal and this is not enough for getting reliable archaeometric responses, secondarily, there is no agreement concerning the analysis of the provenance of the group ‘G’ pottery. Lastly, if one shares Kerschner’s statement, we cannot rule out the supposition that EA 32 was sent from a place different from Apaša and located on the Lydian coast, where the

<sup>24</sup> Hawkins 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Liverani 1999, 406–408; Rainey 2015, 326–331. The tablet EA 31 is a letter sent by the Pharaoh to Tarḫundaradu on the same topic.

king of Arzawa resided at that time. The mobility of the king of Arzawa is demonstrated by a letter, which was sent by a Hittite official to King Tuḫaliya II/III and found at Ortaköy/Şapinuwa. This tablet documents that the royal family of Arzawa was in the city of Ḫappuriya,<sup>26</sup> at the border between Ḫatti and Arzawa, where the Arzawean ruler, presumably, gathered his army there, in preparation for an attack against the Hittites.<sup>27</sup>

The assumption that the king of Arzawa may occasionally have resided on the coast of Lydia is not in contrast with the fact that said region became the core of the Şeḫa River Land after the Hittite conquest of Arzawa, because the country of Şeḫa and that of Mira, as well, were not kingdoms before the time of Muṣili II, but only “dukedom”;<sup>28</sup> thus, the Şeḫa River Land may have been a small polity and not reached the coastal zone, which, instead, remained under the Arzawean control. Hence, in conclusion, the site of Ayasuluk/Ephesus remains the better candidate for the location of the Hittite city of Apaša.

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<sup>26</sup> Süel 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Forlanini 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Hawkins 1998, 16.



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