

AKHENATEN'S FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE KINGDOM OF MITANNI

A POLÍTICA EXTERNA DE AKHENATON E SEU IMPACTO NO REINO DE MITANNI

Article received on: 12/1/2025

Article accepted on: 2/27/2026

Zainab Mohsin Razzoq*

*Department of History, Ibn Rushd College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Baghdad,
Iraq
zainab.allah2405@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Mohammed Ali Abdul-Ameer Hassan*

*Department of History, Ibn Rushd College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Baghdad,
Iraq
mah200_95@colang.uobaghdad.edu.iq

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

Abstract

The study addresses Pharaoh Akhenaten and his relationship with the kingdom of Mitanni during the reign of its king, Tushratta. It examines the impact of Akhenaten's religious reforms on Mitanni and Egyptian foreign policy, highlighting the resulting diplomatic tensions between the two states. By abandoning the traditional diplomacy of gift exchange and the "gold policy," Akhenaten's actions significantly influenced the decline of the Mitanni kingdom.

Keywords: Akhenaten. Mitanni Kingdom. Diplomatic Relations.

Resumo

O estudo aborda o faraó Akhenaton e sua relação com o reino de Mitanni durante o reinado de seu rei, Tushratta. Ele examina o impacto das reformas religiosas de Akhenaton sobre a política externa de Mitanni e do Egito, destacando as tensões diplomáticas resultantes entre os dois Estados. Ao abandonar a diplomacia tradicional baseada na troca de presentes e a "política do ouro", as ações de Akhenaton influenciaram significativamente o declínio do reino de Mitanni.

Palavras-chave: Akenaton. Reino de Mitanni. Relações Diplomáticas.

1 INTRODUCTION

Akhenaten was one of the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty during the New Kingdom and is considered among the earliest monotheistic rulers in ancient history. However, he neglected Egypt's foreign policy at a time when the politics of the Ancient Near East depended heavily on Egypt and the "gold policy," wherein the pharaoh presented gold as gifts to the kings of the East, especially King Tushratta. Akhenaten's priority was to retain gold within Egypt, causing economic strains on Mitanni, which needed increased resources due to pressures from the Assyrians in the east and the Hittite



forces in the north. Consequently, the pharaoh's policies disrupted relations between the two kingdoms.

The research is divided into two main sections: the first focuses on Akhenaten's life and foreign policy, while the second examines his religious reforms and their impact on Mitanni.

2 AKHENATEN AND HIS FOREIGN POLICY

Akhenaten (1352–1336 BCE), the son of Pharaoh Amenhotep III, belonged to the Eighteenth Dynasty. His mother, Queen Ti, played a significant role in the governance of Egypt, both during her husband's reign and that of her son. Initially known as Amenhotep IV—rendered in ancient Egyptian as *Nefer-Khufu-Ra*—he changed his name to Akhenaten, meaning “Aton, the Sun God,” in place of Amenhotep, which signified “Amun is satisfied.” Akhenaten ascended the throne around 1352 BCE following his father's death. His grandfather, Yuya, was appointed as a chief advisor and supervised his upbringing.

Akhenaten began his reign in Thebes at the age of sixteen, with significant assistance from his mother, Ti, who exercised substantial influence over state affairs throughout his 38-year reign. Ti played a central role in both domestic and foreign matters. Akhenaten, married to Queen Nefertiti, was a poet and religious reformer. Domestically, he adhered to royal traditions, completing his father's unfinished construction projects in Nubia, but he invested limited effort in maintaining the Egyptian state's overall strength, which had begun to decline during Amenhotep III's late reign. His focus on religious reforms weakened Egypt's domestic and foreign policies.

Regarding foreign policy, Egypt experienced a decline in influence over Syria. Local Syrian rulers allied with the rising Hittite power, including the Amurru king, Aziru. Relations with Mitanni continued initially through Tushratta, who maintained cordial ties with Queen Ti to sustain alliances between the kingdoms. Tushratta welcomed the new pharaoh, sending messages of condolence and congratulations (EA29), reflecting a hope for continuity and stability.

However, these expectations were unmet. Akhenaten's preoccupation with his religious reforms and disregard for his father's “gold diplomacy” led to tensions.

Complaints arose from Tushratta regarding insufficient gold shipments and delayed diplomatic gifts. The research identifies several factors for this breakdown:

1. Akhenaten lacked the political foresight required for managing foreign relations, including gift diplomacy, gold policy, and treaties with Eastern rulers;
2. His religious focus on the deity Aten, coupled with the suppression of Amun's worship and seizure of Amun's wealth, caused domestic tensions with the priesthood, which in turn weakened Egypt's diplomatic effectiveness;
3. The rise of Hittite king Suppiluliuma I challenged Mitanni's dominance, exposing Mitanni to military pressures and undermining its position as a regional power;
4. Internal opposition to Akhenaten's policies, including the detention of Mitanni envoys, further deteriorated relations, provoking Tushratta's anger and diplomatic frustration (EA29).

As a result, relations between Egypt and Mitanni nearly ceased. Akhenaten's focus on religious projects left Mitanni vulnerable to the Hittites, who supplanted Egypt as the primary regional power. Egypt retained only symbolic control over some southern Syrian territories. Queen Ti died in Akhenaten's 14th regnal year and was buried at Amarna; Akhenaten died around 1336 BCE after a 17-year reign, marking the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty. His successor, Tutankhamun, had a brief reign with no notable accomplishments.

3 RELIGIOUS REFORMS UNDER AKHENATEN AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE KINGDOM OF MITANNI

When Akhenaten ascended the throne following his father, he demonstrated a strong inclination toward the worship of the sun. Nevertheless, he was raised under his father's influence and initially sought to continue his father's policies. He established Thebes as his capital and showed no sign of rebellion, declaring his loyalty to Amun, the god of the kingdom and king of the gods. In the first year of his reign, Akhenaten constructed a temple dedicated to the god Aten in Karnak. The priests of Amun did not resist, despite the pharaoh's proclamation of his new solar doctrine, designating Aten as his favored deity, while still respecting other gods associated with solar worship, such as Atum and Ra.

The worship of Aten was not Akhenaten's invention; it had its origins in the reign of Thutmose IV. Due to the substantial Asiatic influence in Egypt, there arose a need for a religion comprehensible both to foreigners from the major powers and to Egyptians. Atenism developed further under Pharaoh Amenhotep III as a partially monotheistic system, emphasizing one primary deity while maintaining belief in other gods. Akhenaten's adoption of this religion is attributed to two main factors: a spiritual enthusiasm for Aten and political-economic motivations.

The growing influence of Amun's priesthood had increasingly encroached on secular authority, undermining governance and state order. Akhenaten sought to weaken their power by abolishing the worship of Amun and relocating the capital away from Thebes, the center of Amun's cult, in his sixth regnal year (c. 1346 BCE). He declared the worship of a single god, Aten, the radiant solar disc, who was omnipresent and worshiped without any physical representation. Aten was never depicted in statue form. Akhenaten moved the capital to a new city named Akhetaten, meaning "Horizon of Aten," located at Tell el-Amarna on a desert plain defined by a semicircular river boundary.

Due to the pharaoh's preoccupation with religious reforms, Egypt's foreign affairs were neglected, and relations with Mitanni became nearly dormant. Despite King Tushratta's repeated letters urging the continuation of cordial relations, these correspondences revealed a decline in the close ties between the two kingdoms. Mitanni began losing its Egyptian ally, leaving it vulnerable to the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I, who actively sought to eliminate Mitanni as a political entity.

Akhenaten attempted to address the situation, but his efforts were ineffective and delayed due to several reasons:

1. Akhenaten surrounded himself with deceivers and informants both within and outside the kingdom, failing to verify facts personally, which left the political and military situation precarious;
2. The rise of opportunists contributed to administrative corruption and bribery, undermining the pharaoh's authority and directly affecting Syrian territories, causing Egypt to lose its external advantages and influence;
3. Messengers and envoys acted independently of the pharaoh's directives, manipulating local powers and providing skewed reports, which heightened tensions between Egypt and the Eastern kings. This directly impacted Mitanni and

King Tushratta, who were most adversely affected, losing their Egyptian ally and moving toward collapse.

Ultimately, Akhenaten's religious reforms were short-lived. By the end of his reign, Atenism was largely abandoned, Amun's priests regained full authority, and Akhenaten's successors lost prestige and influence. Consequently, Mitanni faced consecutive military campaigns from the Hittites and Assyrians, who emerged as the dominant powers in the region.

3.1 Results

1. Akhenaten was a pharaoh who departed from the Eastern diplomatic policy based on gift exchange and alliances. His neglect of this aspect negatively affected the kingdom of Mitanni;
2. Mitanni had relied on alliances and political marriages to secure temporary advantages, which could only provide limited independence. Over time, these arrangements proved insufficient without strong internal cohesion and a well-organized military. Akhenaten's focus on Egypt's domestic religious and economic affairs altered the regional policy in the East;
3. Akhenaten's emphasis on religious reform was partly an effort to counter the growing power of Amun's priesthood, which he perceived as rivaling his own authority. Establishing a new religion allowed him to diminish their influence and consolidate his power.

REFERENCES

- ABDEL HAMID, Bakri. *Akhenaten: pharaoh of monotheism*. Egypt: Dar Al-Hilal, 2007.
- ABDUL RAHIM, Tharwat Hassan. *Foreign royal marriages and their impact on power balance among ancient Near Eastern kingdoms*. 2025.
- ADEEB, Samir. *History and civilization of ancient Egypt*. Egypt: Alexandria Library, 1997.
- AKGUN, Sevim Colak. *Amarna letters in context: Egypt-Mitanni relations*. 2021.

- ALDRED, Cyril. *Akhenaten*. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, 1992.
- ALI, Mohamed Abdel Latif Mohamed. *The Hurrians and Egypt in the Eighteenth Dynasty*. Alexandria: Modern Arab Office, 1986.
- AL-JANABI, Qais Hatem. *History of the ancient Near East*. Amman: Safaa Publishing, 2014.
- AL-SALMANI, Jamal Nada Saleh. *The Mitanni state: a study in political and civilizational history*. Baghdad, 2010.
- AL-SHAMMARI, Talib Munim Habib. *Political situation in the ancient Near East between the 16th and 11th centuries BCE*. Baghdad: Gilgamesh Library, 2020.
- AL-ZIBARI, Akram Salim. *Relations between the states of the Near East in the 14th century BCE*. 1980.
- BRYCE, Trevor. *Letters of great kings in the ancient Near East*. Cairo: Dar Al-Uloom, 2006.
- BRYCE, Trevor. *The kingdom of the Hittites*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- DARBAS, Hikmat. *Rebellion and resistance in the ancient East: Mesopotamia and Syria in the second millennium BCE*. Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2024.
- GADALLAH, Azza Ali Ahmed. *The Egyptian role in the city of Tunip during the New Kingdom*. 2023.
- HALL, H. R. *The ancient history of the Near East*. London: Methuen, 1913.
- HENRY, James. *Ancient times*. Egypt: American Press, 1930.
- ISMAIL, Farouq. *The kingdom of Nakhshi*.
- MASKA, Reham Riyadh. *Egyptian–Mesopotamian relations between 1550–1200 BCE*. Damascus, 2017.
- MOHAMED, Hiba Dahi. *Condolence practices among ancient Near Eastern rulers*.
- MOHAMMED, Ayman Salah; BAKHIT, David Samir; AHMED, Ziad Sameh; ISMAIL, Abdullah Rifaat; BASYOUNI, Abdullah Abdelmonem; SAID, Omar Hamdi. *The religious movement during the reign of Amenhotep IV using role-playing strategy*.
- MOKHTAR, Mohamed Gamal Eldin. *Ancient Egypt: studies in history and archaeology*. Cairo: Dar Al-Masriya Al-Lubnaniya, 1997.

- MORAN, William L. *The Amarna letters*. London: The Johns Hopkins University, 1992.
- NOBLECOURT, Christiane Desroches. *Tutankhamun: the life and death of the pharaoh*. Egypt: Egyptian General Book Organization, 1974.
- SALEH, Ghassan Abdul. *Correspondence between King Tushratta and the kings of Egypt*. 2013.
- SAMSON, Julia. *The beautiful Nefertiti who ruled Egypt under monotheism*. Cairo: Dar Al-Masriya Al-Lubnaniya, 1992.
- SEIF ELDIN, Ibrahim Nemeer; ALI, Zaki; HASHEM, Ahmed Naguib. *Egypt in ancient times*. Cairo: Madbouly Library, 1998.
- SHOEIB, Amal Nadi; FEKRI, Magdi; MASSAUD, Manal. *The diplomatic role of royal women in ancient Egypt*. 2021.
- TABOUZADEH, Zakia Youssef. *Ancient Egypt from the decline of the Middle Kingdom to the end of the dynasties*. Cairo: Dar Al-Maarefa, 2008.
- VERKOUTIO, Jan. *Ancient Egypt*. Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr, 1993.
- WILHELM, Gernot. *The Hurrians*. England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1989.
- WILLIAMSON, Jacquelyn. *Amarna period*. 2015.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

How to cite this article (APA)

Razzoq, Z. M., & Hassan, M. A. A.-A. (2026). AKHENATEN'S FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE KINGDOM OF MITANNI. *Veredas Do Direito*, 23(5), e235671. <https://doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v23.5671>