

# THE TOPONYM <sup>URU</sup>*A-LA-AT-ḪA* IN THE LETTERS RSO 23 28-35 AND ELSEWHERE\*

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## Summary: The Toponym <sup>URU</sup>*a-la-at-ḫa* in the Letters RSO 23 28-35 and Elsewhere

This brief paper addresses the interpretation of the GN <sup>URU</sup>*a-la-at-ḫa*, attested to in seven letters of the RSO 23 volume and allegedly referring to Alalaḫ. Hereby, the toponym is connected to Alathā, a settlement previously recorded a handful of times—mainly in the Alalaḫ IV archive—and, without a doubt, to be differentiated from Alalaḫ. The exact location of Alathā is unknown, but a general geographical frame for it is proposed.

**Keywords:** Alalaḫ – Alathā – Alaḫtum – Ugarit – Toponyms

## Resumen: El topónimo <sup>URU</sup>*a-la-at-ḫa* en las Cartas RSO 23 28-35 y en otros documentos

Este breve trabajo trata sobre la interpretación del GN <sup>URU</sup>*a-la-at-ḫa*, atestiguada en siete cartas del volumen RSO 23 y supuestamente referente a Alalaḫ. Aquí, el topónimo se conecta con Alathā, un asentamiento registrado previamente un puñado de veces—principalmente en el archivo de Alalaḫ IV—y, sin duda, diferente a Alalaḫ. Se desconoce la ubicación exacta de Alathā, pero se propone un marco geográfico general.

**Palabras clave:** Alalaḫ – Alathā – Alaḫtum – Ugarit – Topónimos

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## INTRODUCTION: ALATHA IN THE LETTERS RSO 23 28-35

As analysed in depth elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the letters RSO 23 28-35<sup>2</sup> show how the Hittite authorities under Tudḫaliya IV (ca. 1237-1209) exerted pressure on Niqmaddu III, the penultimate king of Ugarit (ca. 1325/20-1215), regarding an irrigation and plantation project commended to him.

The project was set in <sup>uru</sup>*a-la-at-ḥa*, a site located in Mukiš. For the sake of continuity, I term this site Alathā throughout this paper, but a spelling Allathā is also possible (see Table 1 below). The GN was identified with Alalaḥ, despite the existence of a town named Alathā in the Alalaḥ archives. This brief contribution is to clarify that Alathā and Alalaḥ are not to be confused, as well as to suggest the geographical area where Alathā should be searched for.

## ALATHA IN THE UGARIT LETTERS AND THE ALALAH TEXTS (LEVELS VII AND IV)

The city to host the abovementioned Hittite irrigation project is constantly spelled <sup>uru</sup>*a-la-at-ḥa*.<sup>3</sup> One of the letters explicitly locates Alathā in the Land of Mukiš (RSO 23 32 7'-8'). In the edition of the texts, the GN has been understood to be Alalaḥ. However, a town of almost identical spelling as Alathā (<sup>uru</sup>*al-la-at-ḥé*, <sup>uru</sup>*a-la-at-ḥé*), of unknown location, is recorded six more times elsewhere: five in the Alalaḥ texts and once in Ugarit (see **Table 1**).<sup>4</sup> A town called Alladu, possibly standing for Alathā, is also recorded.

<sup>1</sup> Cohen and Torrecilla, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Lackenbacher and Malbran-Labat 2016: 61-74.

<sup>3</sup> RSO 23 28: 33, 34, 36, 43; RSO 23 29: 18, 25, 29; RSO 23 30: 35, 36; RSO 23 31: 6, 9, 23; RSO 23 32: 8', 14'; RSO 23 33: 6'; RSO 23 35: 3'' (tr. lat.).

<sup>4</sup> Belmonte 2001: 14-15; Niedorf 1998: 522. The other few attestations of Alalaḥ in Ugarit read *uru-a-la-la-aḥ*, the constant spelling by Alalaḥ local scribes (Belmonte 2001: 8-10).

Text / line(s)	Topic	Spelling
AIT 271: 21	Distribution of grain to individuals	<i>a-la-at-ḫe<sup>ki</sup></i>
AIT 47: 9	Loan record, man and wife enter servitude in Alathā	<sup>uru</sup> <i>al-la-at-ḫe</i>
AIT 166: 17'	Troops list giving names with place of origin	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫé</i>
AIT 220: 13	List of cartwrights and their place of origin	<sup>uru</sup> <i>al-la-at-ḫé</i>
AIT 425: 18	List of chariots handed over to carpenters	<sup>uru</sup> <i>al-la-at-[ḫé<sup>ki</sup>]</i>
RS 4.449: 8	Runaway slave from Alalah staying in Alathā	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫa-ma<sup>ki</sup></i>
RSO 23 28: 33, 34, 36, 43	Letter from the <i>uriyanni</i> to Niqmaddu III	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫa</i>
RSO 23 29: 18, 25, 29	Letter from the <i>uriyanni</i> to Niqmaddu III	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫa</i>
RSO 23 30: 35, 36	Letter from the <i>uriyanni</i> to Niqmaddu III	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫa</i>
RSO 23 31: 6, 9, 23	Letter from the king of Karkemiš to Niqmaddu III	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫa</i>
RSO 23 32: 8', 14'	Letter from the <i>uriyanni</i> (?) to Niqmaddu III (?)	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫa</i>
RSO 23 33: 6'	Letter from the <i>uriyanni</i> (?) to Niqmaddu III (?)	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-at-ḫa</i>
RSO 23 35: 3''	Letter from a Hittite official to the <i>sakinu</i> (?)	<sup>uru</sup> <i>a-la-a[t-ḫa]</i>

**Table 1**

List of attestations of the GN Alathā.

Identification of the GN Alathā became difficult when every attestation of the site was corrected to 'Alalah' in the *editio princeps* of the Alalah texts.<sup>5</sup> However, the number of identical spellings rules out said restoration. Indeed, scholars specialized in the Tell Atchana texts have progressively identified Alathā as a GN other than Alalah.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Wiseman 1953: 46 and 78; 1954: 22; 1959: 29-30, where all attestations are corrected to a-la-la-aḫ.

<sup>6</sup> Niedorf 1998: 522; 2008: 363. See also Zeeb 1998: 871; Belmonte 2001: 14-15; von Dassow

Thanks to this, it becomes clear that the site mentioned in the letters RSO 23 28-35 is Alathā, not Alalah.<sup>7</sup> The context in each tablet makes it more evident that a GN other than Alalah is intended, since Alathā even appears in lists specifying outsiders' places of origin. Let us briefly comment on each of the attestations:

The oldest record of Alathā is found in **AIT 271**, an OB text from Alalah VII listing the palace's grain staples distribution to other towns.<sup>8</sup> The last town is Alathā (l. 21), and its representatives receive 40 units of barley.<sup>9</sup>

Alathā also appears in four Alalah IV texts. The most revealing is **AIT 47**,<sup>10</sup> a loan record witnessed and sealed by King Niqmepa (ll. 1-2) by which a man and his wife enter an individual's house as servants to pay a debt. The house in question is described thus: *a-na É<sup>m</sup>PN a-na É<sup>u</sup> al-la-at-ḥe* "to the house of PN, (namely) to the house in Alathā" (AIT 47: 8-9). Since the contract was written before the king of Alalah, specifying the house's whereabouts means that the GN is not Alalah—otherwise, such specification would be redundant—. Moreover, it is unlikely that a palace scribe misspelled the city's name, especially when an initial AL for Alalah is unattested in both Alalah IV and VII.<sup>11</sup>

**AIT 166** is a fragmentary roster of *ḥabiru*-troops including their respective places of origin;<sup>12</sup> Alathā (*u<sup>u</sup>a-la-at-ḥé*, l. 17') is among the GNs preserved. **AIT 220** is an administrative list of 13 cartwrights, eight of whom—the last ones—are followed by their place of origin (*<sup>m</sup>PN LÚ<sup>u</sup>GN*). One of them came from Alathā (*u<sup>u</sup>al-la-at-ḥé*, l. 13). Most of the cartwrights in AIT 220 reappear in **AIT 425**, where Alathā

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2008: 325 and 506; Turri 2015: 220. On RS 4.449 from Ugarit, see Bunnens 1987: 15; Lackenbacher 2002: 191.

<sup>7</sup> See *contra* von Dassow 2020: 215.

<sup>8</sup> Niedorf 2008: 363. See copy in Wiseman 1954: 22.

<sup>9</sup> Zeeb 1998: 871.

<sup>10</sup> See copy in Niedorf 2008: 361-363; cf. Wiseman 1953: 46.

<sup>11</sup> See Belmonte 2001: 8-10.

<sup>12</sup> The tablet was published by von Dassow 2002: 869-871. See also von Dassow 2008: 201 and 205.

(<sup>uru</sup>*al-la-at-ḥé<sup>ki</sup>*, l. 18) is mentioned again.<sup>13</sup> As in AIT 47, note the initial geminate *-ll-* for the GN in AIT 220 and AIT 425.

Additionally, Alathā could possibly be mentioned in **AIT 90**, albeit with a different spelling: <sup>uru</sup>*al-la-du* (l. 4).<sup>14</sup> A man from this town is given to another individual (as a slave) at the *nuparina*-house in Alalah (ll. 6-7).<sup>15</sup> If Alladu stands for Alathā, this is the only preserved document mentioning both Alalah and Alathā.

Moving on to the texts found at Ras Shamra, **RS 4.449** is a letter sent by King Niqmepa of Alalah (15<sup>th</sup> century BCE) to Ibira(nu) of Ugarit. The message reports that a slave fled from the Alalah palace and then stayed in Alathā (<sup>uru</sup>*a-la-at-ḥa-ma<sup>ki</sup>*, l. 8), before being captured and fleeing again. For the sake of the reader and of my own argument, transliteration and translation of the letter follows:<sup>16</sup>

- 1 *a-na I-bi-ra*
- 2 *qí-bi-ma*
- 3 *um-ma Ni-iq-me-pa-ma*
- 4 <sup>d</sup>ĪŠKUR *na-pí-iš-ta-ka*
- 5 *li-iš-sur*
- 6 *a-nu-um-ma* <sup>lú</sup>*ka-sí-i-e*
- 7 *ša É-ti-ia in-na-bi-it*
- 8 *ù i-na* <sup>uru</sup>*a-la-at-ḥa-ma<sup>ki</sup>*
- 9 *a-ši-ib i-na-an-na*
- 10 *iš-ba-tu-šu-ma*
- 11 *ù iš-tu qa-ti-šu-nu*
- 12 *i-iṭ-ṭe<sub>4</sub>-ru-šu*
- 13 1 *ma-na KÙ.BABBAR*
- 14 *ḥu-ub-bu-ul*
- 15 *ù ki-ma 1 ma-na KÙ.BABBAR*
- 16 *i-na É.GAL a-ši-ib*

<sup>13</sup> Following the attestations of these cartwrights in a third tablet where Alathā is not mentioned (AIT 422), von Dassow (2008: 324-325) proposed that the individual coming from Alathā is some Kušah-ewri.

<sup>14</sup> It is not certain whether this text is from the Alalah IV or VII levels (von Dassow 2008: 393, 506).

<sup>15</sup> Wiseman 1953: 54.

<sup>16</sup> First published by Virolleaud 1936: 23-26; see also Bunnens 1987: 13; Lackenbacher 2002: 191.

- 17 *i-na-an-na* 3 ANŠE.KUR.RA  
 18 *u-ḫal-li-iq-ma*  
 19 *ù it-tá-bi-it*  
 20 *i-na-an-na* LÚ *an-me-e*  
 21 *la tá-kal-la*

<sup>1-3</sup> “Speak to Ibira(nu); thus (speaks) Niqmepa: <sup>4-5</sup> May Adad protect your life! <sup>6-9</sup> Hereby, a man attached to my household ran away and was staying in Alathā. <sup>10-12</sup> Now, they caught him, but he escaped from their hands. <sup>13-16</sup> He owes one mina of silver, and because of that mina of silver, he had stayed in the palace (i.e., Alalakh). <sup>17-19</sup> Now, he has caused three horses to disappear and has run away. <sup>20-21</sup> Do not retain that man!”

Identification of the city in RS 4.449: 8 as Alathā or Alalaḫ was a matter of debate but differing between both cities clarifies the letter meaning. That the fugitive fled from Alalaḫ makes it incoherent for him to have run away precisely to Alalaḫ.<sup>17</sup> It transpires from the text that, even though the fugitive was caught while staying in Alathā, someone not specified freed him from his captors, and he ran away again (ll. 10-12). Note, in addition, that a palace scribe is not likely to have misspelled the name of Alalaḫ.

Furthermore, should Alathā be Alalaḫ, the sentence about the runaway having stayed there would be irrelevant for Ibiranu; hence, that information would be somehow valuable once Ugarit addressed the matter. Indeed, Niqmepa is indicating his counterpart where the fugitive was last seen—i.e., Alathā—, pointing out the route followed by the man when he fled towards the dominions of Ibiranu. Otherwise, Niqmepa would not have bothered Ibiranu with irrelevant information. Conclusively, Alathā lay somewhere south of Alalaḫ, on the way to Ugarit, likely close to the border between both kingdoms.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Na’aman 1980: 115, n. 25 and Bunnens 1987: 15. See *contra* Arnaud (1996: 50, n. 11), who restored the GN <sup>u</sup>u<sup>a</sup>-la-at-ḫa-ma<sup>ki</sup> in RS 4.449: 8 to <sup>u</sup>u<sup>a</sup>-la-la’-ḫa-ma<sup>ki</sup>, probably following Wiseman (1953: 46 and 78; 1959: 29-30).

<sup>18</sup> Turri 2015: 220. Ugarit lay ca. 90 km southwest of Alalaḫ as the crow flies. Cf. the Alalaḫ-Ugarit route proposed by Pucci (220: 333, with map in 340).

As for **RSO 23 28-35**, Alathā is usually mentioned when Niqmaddu III is scolded for his allegedly negligent behavior towards the project, but few details of the city and the project themselves are revealed since they would have been treated at an earlier stage. However, a little information about the site and its vicinity is given. Alathā had a low field area or *šupālu* (RSO 23 33: 6'-9') and it probably lay next to the Orontes river,<sup>19</sup> since an irrigation canal (*atappu*) is ordered to be built (RSO 23 29: 29-32). Furthermore, the context and the Hittite insistence about an agricultural project leaves no doubt that the area in question was much appreciated for its fertility.<sup>20</sup>

Before moving on, let us stress that, even when Alalaḥ was the most important landmark in Mukiš, the Hittite chancellery could not have mistakenly spelled this GN for Alalaḥ so many times,<sup>21</sup> especially when Alalaḥ is presumed to have been the seat of Hittite important governors.<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to accept that the king of Ugarit would be commanded a plantation project in Alalaḥ when a Hittite DUMU.LUGAL was established precisely there. Furthermore, a repeated scribal error for this GN does not agree with the high relevance given to the cultivation project by the Hittite top hierarchy at Karkemiš,<sup>23</sup> who were no doubt well informed about the plantations' whereabouts.

<sup>19</sup> In those days, the Orontes river flowed slightly further to the northeast. Tell Atchana (Alalaḥ), which today lies about 500m northeast of the Orontes, lay southwest of the river in the Late Bronze Age (Casana 2009: 10).

<sup>20</sup> Cohen and Torrecilla, forthcoming.

<sup>21</sup> Even when the signs AT and LA are strikingly similar in the Ḥattuša ductus (see Rüster and Neu 1989: 138, no. 95 and 142-143, no. 105). One can find some correct spellings <sup>URU</sup>a-la-la-ah in Hittite texts as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in CTH 701.6 (= KUB 45.3+) Rs IV 26' (*allanu-wašši*-ritual of Giziya of Alalaḥ, dating to Tudḥaliya I/II or Arnuwanda I; see Salvini and Wegner 1986: 263-275, no. 40; Miller 2004: 506-511). It is also found in the later CTH 135 (= KUB 3.16) Vs 22 (the Treaty with the Elders of Tunip, possibly by Šuppiluliuma I; see Weidner 1923: 136-147; cf. Kitchen and Lawrence 2012: 339-346). For Alalaḥ in the Boğazköy documentation, see del Monte and Tischler 1978: 5; del Monte 1992: 2; Bryce 2005: 71.

<sup>22</sup> Cohen 2017: 298; von Dassow 2020: 214. When a Hittite DUMU.LUGAL sent the letter RS 20.03 (Ugaritica 5 26, with photo in p. 711) to announce Ammištamru II of Ugarit that he had already established himself in Alalaḥ, the spelling used for the city was a correct <sup>URU</sup>a-la-la-ḥe (l. 6).

<sup>23</sup> See Cohen and Torrecilla, forthcoming.

## MARI AND THE ALAḤTUM AFFAIR

The case of Alathā brings to mind that of Alaḥtum (*a-la-aḥ-tam/tim<sup>ki</sup>*), the site in Yamḥad purchased by King Zimri-Lim of Mari (ca. 1775-1762). Alaḥtum was demonstrated to be in the same geographical region as Mukiš, close to the Orontes river, and, following this, it was identified with Alalah.<sup>24</sup> The proposed identification, although possible, is not definitive and alternatives have been raised.<sup>25</sup> Probably because of the corrections in the Alalah texts first edition, which hid the name of Alathā, this GN was never considered as an alternative for Alaḥtum.

Zimri-Lim's acquisition of Alaḥtum (FM 7 21-48)<sup>26</sup> runs as follows. FM 7 28: 1-17 reveals that an envoy of the king named Nur-Sin travelled to the area in search for suitable territories to acquire and cultivate near the river (i.e., the Orontes). He targeted for a destroyed town, in order to (re)build it (FM 7 28: 14-17). Eventually, Nur-Sin chose Alaḥtum, a site apparently in ruins and almost abandoned (FM 7 32: 5-14), since it is claimed that only 50 inhabitants remained within the town (FM 7 33: 9-11; FM 7 35: 4'-5').<sup>27</sup> Once the site was chosen, Zimri-Lim's envoy stayed in Alaḥtum to arrange the (re)construction of the palace and the cultivation of the surrounding land.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, by this transaction Hammurabi I of Yamḥad gave Zimri-Lim not only the city of Alaḥtum, but also "its field, its vineyard, (and) the olive grove from the limits of Alaḥtum."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Durand 2002: 59-66; see also Lauinger 2015: 114 and Sasson 2015: 66-67.

<sup>25</sup> E.g., Alah(a)du in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-millennium Ebla archives (Bonechi 1993: 32; Richter 2005-06: 279; see also Lauinger 2015: 115, n. 3). One might also suggest Alataḥa (*á-la-ta<sub>4</sub>-ḥá-na-ḥá-wa<sup>urni</sup>*), the destruction of which is mentioned in a Luwian inscription (Karkemiš A1a: 9a; Hawkins 2000: 87-91) from the times of Suḫi II (probably 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE). Apart from the name similarity, there is no information to link Alataḥa to Alathā, but it is clearly not Alalah since the latter had long been destroyed (see Savaş 1998: 174-175; Bryce 2012: 91).

<sup>26</sup> Durand 2002: 51-163.

<sup>27</sup> Durand 2002: 122.

<sup>28</sup> Lauinger 2015: 116.

<sup>29</sup> *a-lam a-la-aḥ-tam<sup>ki</sup> A.ŠÀ-šu GEŠTIN-šu<sup>giš</sup> sé-er-da-am iš-tu pa-aṭ a-la-aḥ-tim be-lí ḥa-am-mu-ra-bi a-na be-lí-ia zi-im-ri-li-im id-di-in* (FM 7 36: 10-12).

The acquisition of Alaḥtum, which came along with three other sites, took place some months after the end of Zimri-Lim's long journey to Ugarit in his 9<sup>th</sup> regnal year.<sup>30</sup> Apart from the purchase dossier, Alaḥtum is mentioned in ARM 25 134, drafted precisely during Zimri-Lim's journey to Ugarit.<sup>31</sup> It has been interpreted that Zimri-Lim's interest in a semi-abandoned city so far from Mari's dominions was precisely due to its fertility: valuable commodities such as wine, olive oil, and grain were cultivated in the fields of Alaḥtum.<sup>32</sup>

The Alalaḥ VII archive, which starts only one generation after the purchase of Alaḥtum (ca. mid-18<sup>th</sup> century BCE),<sup>33</sup> depicts Alalaḥ not as a ruined and scarcely inhabited site, but as a prosperous city that benefited from its strategic position connecting the Mesopotamian and Mediterranean trading routes.<sup>34</sup> This does not seem to fit with the description of Alaḥtum by Nur-Sin, unless drastic farming and trading improvements skyrocketed Alalaḥ's preponderance in the region upon the arrival of the Abban dynasty.

On the other hand, AIT 271, from Alalaḥ VII, records Alathā while local scribes were already using *a-la-la-aḥ* for Alalaḥ. Once Alathā has been identified as a separate GN, it must be considered as an alternative link to the Alaḥtum from the Mari archives. This possibility, though, is too difficult to demonstrate from a linguistic perspective until further evidence is discovered.<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding the etymol-

<sup>30</sup> See Durand 2002: 66-71.

<sup>31</sup> Groneberg 1980: 10; Durand 2002: 66. ARM 25 134 (Limet 1986) lists silver payments to different individuals, two of whom brought 1/3 mina of silver to Alaḥtum (1/3 MA.NA KÙ.UD *a-na* PN ù PN *ša a-na a-la-aḥ-tim<sup>ki</sup> ub-lu*, ll. 5-8). The tablet was written in the fourth month (Abum) of Zimri-Lim's 9<sup>th</sup> year, in the final stage of his trip, when the king of Mari had already left Ugarit and was staying again in Ḥalab (see Sasson 1984: 250; Villard 1986: 389-392). It has been suggested that Zimri-Lim visited Alaḥtum during the journey and that he chose then the town to purchase it (Sasson 2008: 100; followed by Podany 2010: 108); however, FM 7 28 shows that Zimri-Lim did not choose any specific site and it was Nur-Sin who eventually picked up Alaḥtum.

<sup>32</sup> Durand 2002: 82-88; Lauinger 2015: 116; see also Chambon 2018: 242.

<sup>33</sup> See Klengel 1992: 60-61; von Dassow 2008: 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Yener 2007: 153-159.

<sup>35</sup> One option could be a *ḥt* < *tḥ* metathesis, but this relies on a foreign mispronunciation and takes place in only one generation's time (from Mari to Alalaḥ VII). Rather, the town could

ogy of the GN, the socio-economic contexts of both Alathā and Alaḥtum seem to coincide: the two sites were in the Land of Mukiš, near or by the Orontes river, and held in high esteem by foreign powers thanks to the fertility of their surrounding lands.

### LOCATING ALATHA

Given the information at hand, establishing a secure location for Alathā is not possible at this point. However, some hints provide a geographic range where the site could be traced for. We know from the studied texts that Alathā lay in a lowlands area somewhere in the Land of Mukiš, south of Alalaḥ, and that it was surrounded with fertile fields. In turn, the borders of the Land of Mukiš with Ugarit have been proposed to have run from the north Ghab valley, in a more or less straight line that would go westwards, approximately, from modern Darkush (by the Orontes river), through the Bdama pass to Jebel Aqra, a natural landmark by the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>36</sup>

Tell Atchana and Darkush are separated by ca. 30 km in a straight line that goes southwards following the Orontes.<sup>37</sup> This 30 km line is a depression formed by the *wadi*, about 90-100 m above the sea level and full of cultivated fields still nowadays. Here, one can find several tells by the river—e.g., the one lying between the modern Syrian towns of Jakarah and Dalbiyah (ca. 15 km north of Darkush). However, since Alaḥtum came into contact with King Zimri-Lim during his journey to Ugarit (ARM 25 134), one may tentatively surmise that the site lay a bit more south, closer to where the Orontes meets the Ugarit-Ḥalab route.<sup>38</sup> This route, in fact, ran slightly south of Darkush, crossing the path between Jebel Aqra (to the northwest) and the

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possibly have been named at first Al'at or Allat (Belmonte 2001: xxix and 14-15), accompanied by the Hurrian suffix *-he* usually forming gentilics (see Wegner 2007: 54; Richter 2016: 697); later on, it would have evolved into Alathā. Cohen 2017: 299, with previous literature.

<sup>37</sup> The area is currently part of the Turkish-Syrian border, separating the Hatay and Idlib provinces.

<sup>38</sup> For the Ḥalab-Ugarit route map, see Villard 1986: 395 and Sasson 2008: 97.

Ansariyeh range (to the southeast).<sup>39</sup> Thus, sites such as ‘Ain Tell (in modern Yisr al-Shugur, by the Orontes, 20 km south of Darkush) or Tell Izhane (in the al-Rouj plain, 7.5 km east of the Orontes and 10 km southeast of Darkush), for instance, could also be possible locations for Alathā.<sup>40</sup> A survey of ancient settlements in the Orontes and al-Rouj plain area could provide additional information not only about the location of Alathā, but also about the productive use of those lowlands in the Late Bronze Age.

To conclude, our knowledge of the geographic landscape of Hittite Syria is refined by each letter that gets published, but so does our knowledge of routes, trading, and political interests. Indeed, Mukiš seems to have played an important role for the Hittite empire not only because of its strategic relevance, but also because of its high agricultural value. The town of Alathā—to be located south of Alalah, on the way to Ugarit and close to the border separating both kingdoms—and its fertile vicinity are proof of the Hittite interest in the region’s horticultural production, as the letters RSO 23 28-35 show.

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<sup>39</sup> See map in Yon 2006: 11.

<sup>40</sup> This location also agrees with the recent interpretation of the letter A.186 (Charpin 2017: 646-649), where Alaḫtum is thought to be meant when the king of Ugarit expressed Ḫammurabi of Ḫalab his will to visit “the house of Zimri-Lim.”

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