

	Egyptians	Hittites	Assyrians	Babylonians	Persians	Seleukids	Romans
Language	Cuneiform on clay tablets. Int'l correspondence found in Babylonian, Assyrian, Hurrian, and Hittite, but mostly Peripheral Akkadian.	Hittite cuneiform on clay or wooden tablets for state letters. (Some on wooden tablets in hieroglyphics.)	Cuneiform Assyrian and Babylonian on clay tablets. Aramaic on parchment discouraged, but maybe used; none extant.	Aramaic, except to temples, for which correspondence was in Babylonian cuneiform	Royal inscriptions in Elamite, Babylonian, Old Persian, & Egypt. hieroglyphs (cf. Esth 3:12). Admin. used Aramaic.	Greek on papyri or stone inscriptions, and some literary sources. Cities could choose to inscribe royal letters on stone.	Originals of high officials do not survive, but c. 9,000 copies survive of papyri or inscriptions. Greek and Latin for state correspondence.
Records Location?	Armarna letters were all (but one) found at Tell el-Amarna and were likely kept in a records office.	Administrative rooms in Tapikka, Hattusa (some in temples), and royal citadel Büyükkale.	“[N]othing much can be said about the original storage and archival organization of the state correspondence” (81). Most letters found at Nineveh, not Assyria’s admin center.	Unknown; Aramaic letters on parchment no longer extant. Cuneiform tablets found in temples Ebabbar of Sippar and Eanna of Uruk.	Depository room for Persepolis Treasury Texts. Local archives kept by satraps. Cf. Ezra 5:17-6:2.	Archives of officials at different levels and of cities and of associations. The kind had his own royal archive.	Little known, but the <i>commentarii</i> , which had copies of hearings, official correspondence, & imperial acts.
Authors	Scribes trained in cuneiform and worked in royal court; some sent to vassal courts. Scribes shaped the way state letters looked; no uniform style.	Trained scribes; some perhaps write in hieroglyphics on wooden tablets.	Scribes trained by the empire with regulated conventions and dispersed to officials throughout the empire.	Trained scribes. Aramaic scribes (<i>sēpiru</i>) were members of royal administration.	“Scribes” (<i>spr</i>) composed, but other hands did the writing in various languages and scripts.	N/A	Emperor could write or dictate; but most matters written by freedman/slaves in early Empire; these grew into larger bureaus.
Privacy	Possibly letter envelopes in some areas, but uncertain.	Uncertain. Possibly wrapped in cloth or put in a bag.	Sealed in envelopes with official sender’s seal.	Special royal seal impressed on letter envelopes (conjectured; 101).	Letters rolled, tied with string encased in clay on which seal impressed.	Likely sealed with personal seals and with a clay tag.	Sealed with signet ring and/or sealed with tablet, wax, and string.
Formula for letters?	Yes. Prostration formula to king is most common, but it can vary.	“Strict code of address and greeting formulae which expressed the relative status of those participating in the correspondence (47).	Format and language of state letters is “homogeneous throughout the empire” (68).	“Fairly rigid rules” for form of salutation formulae, body of the missive, and forms of address (104).	Fairly standardized; “relative social position of individuals can be deduced from the various forms of address employed (137).	Letters addressed to Greek cities and communities differed from those to state officials. Relative power determined the register.	Types of letters included edicts, letters, mandatas, private rescripts, <i>adnotatios</i> , & oral pronouncements (175–177). Style grew in flourish over time.

Messengers	Single messenger delivered in person and was responsible for it (oral or written). Sometimes translators accompanied int'l letters. Most rode horses.	Single messenger brought oral or written letter; oral prominent. "Riders" (horses and mules) and "runners" were used.	Messengers road mules, which were expensive to cultivate and train (and infertile, being hybrids).	Oral messages rare; almost always written correspondence.	Riders selected by the king, and thus prestigious, solo or groups of three max. Their speed was "legendary" (126).	Riders on horseback and probably a "satrapal" postal service for regional service.	Riders traveled entire route, changing mounts/carriages, so they could be questioned or comment on the letter.
Roads	No official road system, such as that in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, is attested (30).	System of roads with delegated officials and road stations. None found to date.	"The King's Road" was sanctioned by the emperor, who demanded the governors help maintain it. Post stations were installed so messengers could receive rest and pass on letters to another messenger for speed's sake. The Road and stations were only used by the state.	No dedicated infrastructure in place, but utilized the "royal roads" inherited from the Assyrian Empire (103).	Complex system of roads maintained by the governors with post stations supplied by the governors. Used for official governmental units only. Cf. Neh 2:7-9.	Evidence is scarce, but there was likely a royal postal service with messengers on horseback as well as the local satrapal service. These roads would have been inherited from the Persian Empire (160).	Augustus setup the public post (<i>cursus publicus</i>). Permits allowed official businessmen to use it. It ran along major highways of the Empire and did not necessarily have provisions along all the routes.