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DEATH AND THE HITTITE KING

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The Indo-European component in Hittite culture is not large. Nevertheless, contact with the Hittites did retain certain significant aspects of inherited PIE institutions. 1 Professor Polome, the honoree of this volume, has himself provided examples through his comparison of Hitt. *gaw·-rē*—"king" with Gmc. *anes* and Lit. *bygos·asembly* with the family of Oke. *pel·trēva*.

One area where societies are notably conservative is in their views on death and afterlife and in their funeral customs. Pulver (1906a) and (1906b) has presented evidence that the Hittites preserved the PIE notions of death as a meeting with one’s ancestors and of the desired afterlife as a bountiful existence in a well-watered and indolent past.

Both of these concepts are attested in our principal Hittite text on death and afterlife, the royal funeral rites (see Cottee, 1950). While the expression become a slave may be restricted to the Hittite king, the recent study by Archi (1979b) suggests that other members of the population were also accorded a status after death comparable to that of the Roman mithra. A much gloomier view of life after death appears in the fragmentary text discussed by Hoffner (1988), but the status of this composition is not yet clear. As he indicates, we cannot exclude the possibility that it reflects a foreign tradition.

One Hittite text dealing with death has not yet received the attention it deserves. I refer to the final paragraph of the Old Hittite Testament of Hattusili I. The passage has been cited in passing as evidence for burial vs. cremation (Cottee, 1981: 168), but its full significance has not been appreciated.

The Testament is available in a full edition by T. Sommer and A. Falkenstein (1938). The edition is rightly regarded as a landmark in the field, and I do not wish to dispute its overall high quality. Nevertheless, no work of scholarship may be regarded as sacrosanct, and the present case is no exception. In particular, I defy any one to make coherent sense of the author’s German translation of the final paragraph (523) of the text (1938: 168).

The fundamental problem is that their assumption that the final attested passage forms part of the official testament (see text explicit acknowledgment of the difficulties, 1938: 160). As shown by the text itself, the assumption is erroneous. The provisions of the testament actually end with 521. The following 522-523 finishes the adopted heir to heed the king’s words. As correctly seen already by Sommer and Falkenstein, the phrasing of this paragraph is formulaic. The key is to have the words of the testament read to him monthly, and he is to ‘impress the words on his heart’.

With this final admission the testament, the official document, is complete. What then is the following paragraph 523? I assert that it is due to a mistake. The scribe who was recording the king’s words failed to stop when the testament was finished and kept on writing down what he heard. The result is something unique and precious in the Hittite corpus: direct reportage of a live event. 3 And what an event it is! The king is dying, or at least thinks he is (we do not know whether Hattusili I actually died on this occasion or not). Having completed the task of dictating the testament, the king breaks down and unburdens himself of his innermost feelings before the audience of those assembled to witness the testament. The onlookers find this spectacle acutely embarrassing, but are unable to quash the distraught king. In the confusion, the scribe’s indiscipline in recording all of this is overlooked, and this account is incised in the official document and even duly translated into Akkadian. Viewed in this light, the highly emotional and nuanced nature of the text of SS makes sense.

KUB I 18 III 40-73:

LUGAL.GAL Ina·-a-sar·na·a·na a-MU.A.Oba-sa·la·pa·ru·me·m-am·-um·-um
le·-t-ru-ru·ru·ru-ru a-MU.A.Oba-sa·la·pa·ru·me·m-am·-um
LUGAL·-a·t a-MU.A.Oba-sa·la·pa·ru·me·m-am·-um

In translation:

The great king, the labeena, keeps speaking to [a] steward: ‘Do not forsake me!’ (In order) that the king may not say thus to the people, the palace officials say: ‘Look, she is interrogating the old women’ (i.e. the noblemens). The king says thus to them: ‘She is still now interpreting the mother’s? Don’t know?—Do not forsake me, do not! Interrogate me! I will give [you] my words as a sign. [Wash me] well! Protect me on your bosom from the earth!’

Notes:

line 60: the precise meaning of paluwa— is still not determined, but all occurrences point either to reject, drive away or ‘forsake, abandon, forget.’ See Götze-Pedersen (1934: 206f), Friedrich (1921: 165), Kreuzer (1966: 481) and Goetsinger (1979: 334). Contrary Sommer and Falkenstein (1938: 190), the corresponding Akkadian verb is used as aegi to

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line 65: -- ite...term. This cannot mean 'speak of her', contra Sommer (1938: 191). All the alleged examples cited with -ite are accusative, and even these do not mean 'speak of me', but rather represent the Hittite form of indirect speech. The active enclitic -ite also occurs in clauses where the subject is not clearly stated, as in the preceding context, which is taken as Hittite reruku, which is not as precise as the English construction here. The second part of the sentence is a direct speech, as in the example above. The whole point of the passage is that the king in his diet is given a word of advice by his successor in a context where his mere presence would be inappropriate.

line 65-66: the clause -man-ite...term, with the prohibitive negative and the optative particle -ite, expresses a wish, namely, that the king not speak in this manner. Since the wish is clearly not that of the king, to require that he speak in this manner would be inappropriate. What is meant on the relationship of this clause to what follows: the palace officials say what they do to the king because they are trying to put an end to his embarrassing outburst.

line 67: I restore — emal 'to them' rather than -ite 'to her' (with Sommer and Falkenstein) because in the next sentence the king refers to Ḫattāryu in the third person (the restored verb is ascribed by the Akkadians). This would make no sense if the king were already speaking to Ḫattāryu again.

line 68-69: I find it most natural to take the second sentence as well as the first as a question. What remains unclear is whether we should understand the second sentence as well as the first ("Don't I know that she is still now interpreting the southerners?'") or what follows ("Why do I know (anything?) — interpretate me!"). The fact that the question is directed once again at Ḫattāryu argues for the former.

line 72-73: This correct translation was given already by Gritz (1922: 183). Sommer (1938: 198) translates -ite on the hypothesis that it is impossible for a woman to save a man from death! Obviously, this is entirely irrelevant, which Sommer himself later retracted. Having rejected the only natural interpretation, Sommer must take the ablative phrase as an instrumental: 'protect me on your bumper with the earth'. Since this is manifest nonsense, Sommer's attempt to totally set aside the nature of the construction into 'On your bumper lay me in the earth.' First of all, this simply is not what the Hittite says. Furthermore, we are not dealing with a man calmly giving instructions for his funeral (pace Sommer). No dying man is going to ask to be put down inside the earth as an expression of his desire. The corresponding Akkadian see erēpu ūrāna cannot mean 'protect me from the earth' (Sommer and Falkenstein, 1938: 199). Akkadian does not regularly inflect with nāpiru that from which one is to be protected, but the construction does occur, and with nāpiru see the example rapi-ru šu-ru ippā-ru-ra-a 'Protect yourselves from snails' cited by Reiner (1960: 30) under sub nāpiru 3e. Since ma is used frequently in Akkadian to indicate 'place from' with other verbs (Oppenheim, 1960: 141), its use here to render a Hittite ablative seems quite unwarrantable.

I may summarize the scene as follows. The very act of dictating the long testament must have put a considerable strain on the seriously ill king. He would not be at all surprising if the king, relaxing from this supreme effort, of course, but that is no valid objection. The whole point of the passage is that the king in his diet is given a word of advice by his successor in a context where his mere presence would be inappropriate.

The embarassed members of the court try to quiet the king by telling him that Ḫattāryu is busy consulting the southerners, presumably on his account. Mention of the southerners breaks into the king's consciousness, but only momentarily. Reiterating briefly to the officials, he then takes the idea of looking for signs and turns again to Ḫattāryu, insisting that he himself can provide the necessary signs, if she will only pay attention. The scene reaches an emotional climax with his plea that she take him to her bosom and protect him from the earth (i.e. from death and the burial which follows). The text thus ends abruptly. It is conceivable that these are the king's last words—that he dies immediately thereafter. However, it seems a rather great coincidence that the king would manage to complete the entire testament and then die only moments later. It is more likely that the scribe breaks off because the courtiers, finding the king's raving completely intolerable, finally put an end to the scene. In any case, I submit that this remarkable paragraph represents a vivid eyewitness account of the Hittite king wrestling with his fear of death.

What does this account tell us of the Hittites' attitudes and practices relating to death? Both more and less, I think, than has been claimed. The king's plea for protection from the earth does clearly imply burial. The immediately preceding mention of washing might further suggest direct burial of the corpse without cremation. However, this single text certainly seems a very slim basis for the conclusion of Gurley (1981: 168ff) that direct burial was the standard practice of the Old Hittite period, succeeded only later by the cremation described in the royal funeral rites, a change he attributes to Greek influence. Recent research has shown that both direct burial and burial after cremation were practiced in Central Anatolia from early in the 2nd millennium B.C.E. (see MacKee, 1975: 190f, with refs.). While the attested manuscripts are Hittite-Hittite, linguistic criteria show that the royal funeral rites were composed no later than the Middle Hittite period, and they are likely to be Old Hittite in composition.
(see Melchert, 1977: 736). Based on what we know now, I believe we can only safely assume the coexistence of both direct burial and cremation in the Hittite tradition, as now conceded by Gurney (1981: 171, note). Evidence for both practices is also found in virtually every other Indo-European tradition (see already Schrader, 1923: 102ff). Schrader (1923: 108) presents arguments for the primacy of burial, but he qualifies as merely probable his assumption of burial alone for the PIE speech community. In any case, we cannot resolve the issue on the basis of the Hittite evidence.

Of far more interest, it seems to me, is what the present text tells us about the real attitude of an individual Hittite towards imminent death. Since we find the expression 'become a god' used for the death of a Hittite king already in the Edict of Tepapini, the concept must be Old Hittite. As mentioned above, the evidence presented by Pihl (1969a) and (1969b) shows that the Hittites also inherited the idea that upon dying one is welcomed into the world of the afterlife by one's ancestors, particularly by one's mother. Despite these assurances of happy immortality, however, the dying [Hattushili is frightened. He sees only the immediate certainty that he will soon be put down into the cold, dark earth alone, and like many a poor mortal since he finds this a terrifying prospect.

As I have suggested elsewhere (1986: 110), there seems to be little fundamental difference between us and ancient peoples when it comes to facing death. Hattushili's words speak to us directly across the centuries. His fear is palpable. We not only can once understand but also are moved by his agony and his desperate cry for his loved one's tender comfort. These emotions are neither Hittite nor Indo-European, neither ancient nor modern, but simply human.

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NOTES

1See for example Watkins (1989: 78ff) with references.

2For the phraseology of both of these provisions see Sommer- Falkenstein, 1938: 178f. As the authors correctly insist (1938: 188), the final charge to Mallil to do what is in his heart must not be understood as license to do whatever he wishes. Rather he is to follow the dictates of the testament which he has 'impressed' on his heart.

Gurley (1981: 173) stresses the directness of expression and individuality of the entire testament, which I would not deny. My understanding of the final paragraph also requires us to assume that the testament was genuinely dictated by the king himself. Nevertheless, the testament is an official document, intentionally formulated in the presence of (and undoubtedly with the counsel of) members of the court and expressly meant for public consumption. As such, it still lacks the unguarded spontaneity which I consider is found in the final paragraph.

4For the establishment of the Hittite text I refer the reader to Sommer and Falkenstein (1938: 168-190), whose readings and restorations I follow unless noted otherwise. For brevity's sake I omit here the full Akkadian text, which is certainly a translation of the Hittite (see Sommer and Falkenstein, 1938: 202). Readers should know that the Akkadian is the basis for most of the authors' restorations of the Hittite.
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