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46) KUB 21.38 obv. 17'-18', a letter from Ḫattusili III's queen Pudu-Ḫeba to Ramesse II, are understood as indicating that Ḫatti was experiencing famine. HOFFNER's (2009: 283, with lit.; similarly BECKMAN 1996: 127; EDEL 1994, 217) recent translation for example reads, 'Concerning the fact that I wrote to my brother as follows: "What civilian captives, cattle and sheep should I give (as a dowry) to my daughter? In my lands I do not even have barley (*nu-wa-mu-kán ŠÀ KUR.KUR^{MEŠ} [ḫa]l-ki-iš NU.GÁL*). The moment that the messengers reach you, let my brother dispatch a rider to me. ..."' This, in turn, is often seen as one of several attestations of grain shortage and famine in Ḫatti and in the eastern Mediterranean littoral in the latter years of the Late Bronze Age (KNAPP / MANNING 2016: 121; DIVON 2008: 101f.; SINGER 1999: 715; KLENGEL 1974).

The present note intends to do no more than suggest that the operative sentence should be understood as a facetious rhetorical question rather than an indicative, thus striking one attestation from the list of those concerning famine.

First, the sentence as an indicative would not fit the tone of the rest of the letter, in which Pudu-Ḫeba seeks to assure the pharaoh, who had inquired several times concerning the delay in sending him the Hittite princess betrothed to him, that the princess and her dowry will be worth the wait. It would be quite odd if she were to mention as an aside that her land was experiencing a famine while at the same time assuring him that the captives, the sheep and cattle to be included in her daughter's dowry are bound to meet his expectations. As Hittite interrogative sentences are often unmarked in writing, there is no philological reason why it should not be translated as such.

Second, Pudu-Ḫeba chides Pharaoh in the immediately preceding paragraph for his impatience amounting to an unbecoming greed. In this context she poses in fact a very similar facetious rhetorical question: 'Does my brother have nothing at all?! (*A-NA ŠEŠ-IA-ma NU.GÁL*) Only if the Son of the Sun-God, the Son of the Storm God, and the Sea have nothing, do you have nothing! Yet, my brother, you want to enrich yourself at my expense! This is unworthy of name and lordly status' (KUB 21.30 obv. 15'-16'; HOFFNER 2009, 283).

The passage in question should thus be translated, 'Concerning the fact that I wrote to my brother as follows: "~~(Concerning) those~~ civilian captives, cattle and sheep should I give (as a dowry) to my daughter? – Do I not even have barley in my lands?! The moment that the messengers reach you, let my brother dispatch a rider to me. ..."'

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