

Εοthen

Collana di studi sulle civiltà dell'Oriente antico
fondata da Fiorella Imparati e Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli
diretta da Stefano de Martino

Stefano de Martino – Elena Devecchi

ANATOLIA BETWEEN THE 13th AND THE 12th CENTURY BCE



LoGisma editore

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editor
Stefano de Martino

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Questa pubblicazione è stata realizzata con il contributo della
Università degli Studi di Torino - Dipartimento di Studi Storici

Progetto DEMS_PRIN_2015_16_01 “L’Anatolia antica: politiche imperiali e culture locali
tra XV e VII secolo a.C. Problemi di etnicità, assetti urbani e territoriali, tradizione e
innovazione”.

Stefano de Martino – Elena Devecchi (a cura di), *Anatolia between the 13th and the
12th century BCE*.

(Eothen; 23)

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www.logisma.it - mail@logisma.it

ISBN 978-88-94926-25-5

Printed in January 2020

ARE THERE SIGNS OF THE DECLINE OF THE LATE HITTITE STATE IN THE TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION FROM HATTUŠA?

Jared L. Miller

While working recently on a general history of the Hittites, I was forced to deal with the question posed in the title of this paper. And my conclusion was, in short: No, there are no signs, or at least no clear signs, of the decline and impending collapse of the Hittite state in the documentation from Hattuša. It should be emphasized at this point that only the question as it pertains to the textual documentation from Hattuša will be discussed in this paper, not the archaeological data and not the textual material from Ugarit, Emar, Amarna or other sites, which, taken all together, result in a somewhat more informative, though still very incomplete, picture.¹ Further, as this paper attempts to address a very extensive and complex topic in only a few short pages, it will necessarily be the case that myriad aspects of very many issues raised will remain untouched as I lay out the argument in broad strokes. I will try to point to recent literature concerning some of these debates, but even this must be kept to a minimum within the framework of this paper.

Scholarly opinion regarding the question at hand varies significantly, even radically.² Schachner concludes, for example (2011, 113): “Allem in allem deuten die archäologischen und textlichen Indizien eher auf eine schrittweise und schleichende Auflösung des fragilen hethitischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgefüges hin”, whereby he refers explicitly to

¹ As Knapp – Manning (2016) have recently argued, the precise dating of much of the evidence often cited as relevant to the end of the Bronze Age is often questionable. For a recent popular account that seeks to draw a picture based on all available documentation see Cline 2014.

² Among the countless studies addressing the questions raised in this paper are, in addition to those cited, Lehmann 1996; Sörenhagen 1996; Singer 2000; Sommer 2001; Fischer *et al.* 2003; Bryce 2005a, 327-356, 2005b; Yakar 2006; Klinger 2007, 106-119; Collins 2008, 65-80; Simon 2009; Giorgieri – Mora 2010; Halayqa 2010; Strobel 2011; Bryce 2012, 9-31; Freu 2013; Genz 2013; Singer 2013; Weeden 2013; Klinger 2015; de Martino 2016, 103-115. Concerning the Sea Peoples I will mention only Killebrew – Lehmann 2013 and Fischer – Bürge 2017.

archaeological and textual evidence. And further (ibid., 110): “Textquellen deuten auf innere Unruhen und wirtschaftliche Schwierigkeiten infolge von Mißernten hin”.

Similarly, Klengel (1999, 299) has written, “Tendenzen, die sich bereits zu Zeiten des Tudhaliyas IV. andeuteten, scheinen sich demnach unter Arnuwanda III. verstärkt zu haben: Unruhen in Ḫatti, ein Abrücken Ugarits und wohl auch anderer syrischer Fürstentümer von Ḫatti sowie eine weitergehende Selbstständigkeit von Karkamiš bei der Verwaltung des hethitischen Nordsyriens. Diese Entwicklungen trugen zweifellos dazu bei, dass die Stabilität des Reiches insgesamt in Frage gestellt wurde”.

And Singer, one of the first to emphasize internal decay over enemy invasion, wrote in reference to a number of oath and instruction texts (1985, 120-121): “The scattered allusions found in these texts reflect increasingly severe internal problems, which already make their appearance under Tudhaliya. Without diminishing the role of the outside enemies in the fall of the Hittite Empire, I feel that more weight should be given to the symptoms of inner decline and disintegration. The ruler of an empire who is brazenly disobeyed by his vassals, who is distrusted by his own people, and has to put his closest peers to an oath of allegiance, can hardly be unaware of the impending catastrophe. His (Tudhaliya IV’s) pious preoccupation with the mortuary shrine of his father and with other similar religious establishments is not uncharacteristic of ominous times. Rather than reflecting self-confidence and security, it is a mute plea to the gods and spirits to grant salvation where the sceptre and the sword have failed”.

These assessments can be contrasted, for instance, with Otten’s view (1983, 20): “Von einer Schwächung des Königtums in seinem Herrschaftsanspruch und in seiner dynastischen Legitimation ist in den Texten und den Siegeln also nichts zu entnehmen. Ebenso wenig sprechen diese aber von konkreten außenpolitisch-militärischen Schwierigkeiten. ... Vom Norden und Westen Kleinasiens ist in diesen Texten nicht die Rede. Nichts deutet auch in den Boğazköy-Texten auf eine konkrete Gefahrensituation im Südwesten oder an der Südküste Kleinasiens”. And regarding Syria Otten wrote (1983, 19), referring to Šuppiluliuma II’s Treaty with Talmi-Tešob (CTH 122), “Die stabile Konstruktion der hethitischen Herrschaft in Syrien, wie sie von Šuppiluliuma I. eingerichtet worden war, scheint also fortzubestehen, vielleicht gar formell-juristisch ausgebaut worden zu sein”.

Finally, Veenhof (2001, 196) writes succinctly that “es keine deutlichen Anzeichen dafür gibt, dem Untergang des hethitischen Großreichs um 1180 v.Chr. sei eine Phase zunehmender Schwäche und des Zerfalls vorausgegangen”.

With these latter authors I will argue that the textual sources from Hattuša provide us with little or no evidence that clearly points to the decline and impending collapse of the state. I would suggest that, if we did not know from subsequent sources that the Hittite empire indeed collapsed at this point, we would not be able to derive its demise from the textual material from Hattuša. Only in light of its subsequent collapse, that is to say, only with the benefit of hindsight, do we like to point to various events or perceived trends in the textual material and suggest that these indicate or led to the coming catastrophe. Without this hindsight, however, these do not, I would suggest, indicate anything of the sort, or at least not necessarily, and in most cases, not even probably. The attempts to identify such indices are understandable, of course. It is natural to see in a late text a negative event or development and to cry, “See how bad things were getting? No wonder the empire collapsed!” without asking whether such events were regular occurrences, without examining their dating more closely, or without asking whether there is actually any indication that the development might have had some causal or at least contributing relationship to the collapse. Naturally, I cannot address in this paper all of the issues raised by these and other authors, so I will concentrate on a selection of them.

In the passage quoted above Schachner speaks of “innere Unruhen” and “wirtschaftliche Schwierigkeiten” indicated in the texts, and further, that these arose “infolge von Mißernten”. With regard to economic difficulties, Schachner gives no specifics as to what texts he is referring to, and it seems that he has assumed that what might be gathered from the archaeological evidence, and perhaps from texts relating to the situation in Syria and the Levant, can also be found in the texts from Hattuša or texts relating to Anatolia. But this is not the case, as far as I can see. At no period in the documentation from Hattuša is sufficient evidence available for one to conclude that the state was experiencing economic difficulties, except perhaps for the claims in Muršili II’s plague prayers,³ which, however,

³ E.g. “You have allowed a plague into Hatti, and the whole of Hatti is dying. No one prepares for you the offering bread and the libation anymore. The plowmen who used to work the fallow fields of the gods have died, so they do not work or reap the fields of the gods. The grinding women who used to make the offering bread for the gods have died, so they do not

obviously provide no quantitative data, let alone any indication of demographic trends from Muršili's reign until the end of the empire.

And while it is true that a few texts indicate periods of drought and famine (Divon 2008), only one of these, KUB 40.91(+), can be dated to the latest phase of the Empire period (Tani 2002). Bo 2810, for example, the centrepiece in Klengel's (1974) paper on Hungerjahre in Ḫatti, dates palaeographically to the middle of the 13th century, not the end of the empire.⁴ One can observe, however, a tendency to date things that may be seen as indicating trouble as late as possible and then to assume that they had something to do with the collapse. Often the dating is quite suspect and leads to circular reasoning, along the lines of: "the text seems to point toward difficulties, so it must be late; and you see, in this late text we have difficulties that point toward the collapse".

Even less are there any indications in the texts from Hattuša that any internal unrest or economic difficulties might have arisen "infolge von" failed harvests. One might reasonably assume that they may have done so, but such is not attested in the texts. And of course, even establishing that crop failures, famine and severe economic decline occurred does not necessarily suggest that these caused or contributed to a society's collapse. After all, the United States, e.g., enjoyed its period of greatest power, wealth and influence shortly after its Dust Bowl days and Great Depression.

With regard to internal unrest, Schachner goes on to discuss the tensions between Tarhuntašša and Hattuša, which, he notes, had their roots in the usurpation of the throne by Hattušili, who thereby displaced the line of his brother Muwattalli II and his son, Kuruntiya, leading to what Schachner and others see as a crisis in legitimacy. It has, of course, become ever clearer with the publication of the Bronze Tablet, the discovery of Kuruntiya's seals

[make] the gods' offering bread any longer. The cowherds and shepherds of the corrals and sheepfolds from which they used to select sacrificial cattle and sheep are dead, so that the corrals and sheepfolds are neglected. So it has come to pass that the offering bread, the libations, and the offerings of animals have stopped" (KUB 24.3++ ii 10-20; Singer 2002, 52).

⁴ Also the most well-known case of reference to famine, namely that of Pudu-Heba in her letter to Ramesses II, in which she attempts to assure him that her daughter's dowry will be worth the wait, should be understood as a rhetorical question intended to emphasize her country's wealth, not its poverty, as I argued recently (Miller 2016); an unfortunate copy-paste error resulted in a confused translation of the passage discussed in this NABU note. It should have read, '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? – Do I not even have barley in my lands?!"' Also, the title of the note should have been "KUB 21.38 obv. 17'f. and ~~Famine~~ Prosperity in the Land of Ḫatti".

and his Hatip inscription, in which he takes the titles Great King and *labarna*, as well as analyses of a number of oracle protocols, that there were tensions between the two branches. Further, it is well documented that Hattušili and Pudu-Heba were extremely concerned, even paranoid, about Urhi-Tešob, Kuruntiya, and the security of Tudhaliya's throne, a paranoia that seems to have infected Tudhaliya as well. Van den Hout (1991; 2001, 215-220) has even suggested that an apparent reinthronisation of Tudhaliya might be linked with a brief assumption of power by Kuruntiya in Hattuša. There are, however, without wanting to exclude the possibility, numerous problems with connecting this apparent crisis of legitimacy and even Kuruntiya's potential coup with the collapse of the empire. I will very briefly discuss just three.⁵

First, while Hattušili, Pudu-Heba and Tudhaliya are well attested being quite worried about these tensions, there is no evidence that Šuppiluliu/ama was similarly affected by their paranoia or – setting aside Südburg for the moment – by any more concrete tensions with the descendants of Urhi-Tešob or Kuruntiya.⁶ The collapse of the Empire occurred, after all, at least some 30 or 40 years after Tudhaliya's ascension to the throne. Thus Gilan's (Gilan – Mouton 2014, 106) assertion that the “atmosphere of fear and uncertainty reached its peak in the reign of the last Hittite king, Šuppiluliuma II” must be seen as an extrapolation from the situation documented under Tudhaliya IV and from the knowledge that the collapse took place at some point during or after Šuppiluliu/ama's reign. No documentation suggests such a peak of uncertainty. This underscores how important it can be to distinguish clearly between the picture we may want to create in order to illustrate what we believe might have happened on the one hand and on the other what exactly is attested in what texts from what sites.

Second, this state of crisis regarding the legitimacy of the royal line occupying the throne at any given time was surely the norm throughout most of Hittite history, not the exception. In fact, the Empire Period was by far the

⁵ The so called “Hešni Conspiracy” derived from KUB 31.68 and discussed most recently by Tani (2001) is based largely on the restorations made by the text's various editors and interpreters. Bryce's (2005a: 300) assertion, e.g., “Should the first assassination attempt upon the king fail, a second was to be made, using poison”, is largely fantasy and philologically baseless.

⁶ This would be all the more surprising if Kuruntiya indeed gained the throne in Hattuša at some point, since any coup must have been rather later than earlier in Tudhaliya's reign, as de Martino (2010) has pointed out based on the attestation of Kuruntiya functioning as an ambassador for Tudhaliya in sensitive political matters in the so-called Milawata letter, which is itself likely to be dated not too early during Tudhaliya's reign.

most stable period as far as assassinations and usurpations are concerned, with Hattušili III's apparently bloodless usurpation being the only irregular transfer of power since Šuppiluliuma I. In contrast, at least three Old Kingdom and three Middle Hittite rulers (or designated rulers) were assassinated (Muršili I, Zidanta I, Huzziya II, Huzziya III, Muwattalli I, Tudhaliya the Younger), while at least nine, depending on how one counts, came to the throne in an irregular or unforeseen manner (Hattušili I, Hantili I, Ammuna, Telipinu, Tahurwaili, Hantili II, Muwattalli I, Tudhaliya I, Šuppiluliuma I). The main difference is that the resulting uncertainty during the generations of Hattušili III and Tudhaliya IV is so well documented. Only the texts witnessing the fears of Šuppiluliuma I and Muršili II and perhaps the Telipinu Edict come even close to rivalling this window into the psychological effects the usurpation of the throne must have had on the royal family and the court.

This cluster of documentation during the middle of the 13th century might well mislead us in general, too, in that we are able to find some 10 times as many difficulties and negative events in them, simply because we have 10 times as many texts. In other words, tracing developments, tendencies, increases or decreases in the Hittite texts is a task fraught with methodological challenges, not least of which is the lack of comparable data sets. How can one even hope to establish any quantitative development from a period that produced a few dozen text fragments to one from which thousands of texts are available? Indeed, one should immediately be quite skeptical when one reads of developments or of an increase or a decrease of any sort based on the Hittite documentation.

Third, we simply do not know if this crisis in legitimacy and the tensions with Kuruntiya's line actually played any role in the decline and collapse of the state. It is conceivable that it may have, but there is no clear evidence that it did. Interpretations of the evidence vary widely. Melchert (2002, 142) sees, largely on the basis of the Südburg inscription, a liquidation of Tarhuntašša by Šuppiluliu/ama II, while Singer (1996) assumes that Great Kings in Hattuša and Tarhuntašša may have lived happily side by side. And if van den Hout is correct in his interpretation of the second enthronisation of Tudhaliya following Kuruntiya's coup d'état,⁷ then

⁷ Van den Hout (2001, 215-220) deftly defends the coup d'état hypothesis against Singer's multiple Great King theory, and while the jury remains out, the balance of the evidence would indeed seem at present to point to the former. The only other possibility would be to assume the existence of an otherwise unattested Kuruntiya who ruled as Great

this might well point not toward an impending catastrophe, but to the successful deflection of Kuruntiya's challenge.

Of course, much depends on the outcome of the current debate on the reattribution of the Südburg inscription and whether Tarhuntašša is to be seen as an object of the campaigns mentioned in it, which has likewise been placed in doubt (see Goedegebuure 2011; Oreshko 2013; Klinger 2015, 101-104; Payne 2015, 75, n. 125, 78-84; and most recently Mora's and Weeden's contributions in this volume). If, as has been assumed until recently, the inscription is to be attributed to Šuppiluliu/ama II, and if it indeed records his reasserting control over Tarhuntašša, then we have a very different picture than if the inscription stems from Šuppiluliuma I (or Muršili II in his commemoration) and touches on other toponyms entirely. Even if the traditional interpretation is upheld, however, it would not necessarily demonstrate decline during the reign of Šuppiluliu/ama II, but, perhaps to the contrary, that even at this late stage he was able to successfully fend off a grave challenge to the authority of the empire.

With regard to this crisis in legitimacy, Schachner refers also, as Singer and others have done, to the loyalty oaths. However, these loyalty oaths are attested since the Old Hittite Kingdom, and those from the late Empire Period do not indicate anything new or abnormal (cf. Giorgieri in this volume). In the Old Hittite Instructions and Oath Imposition for Royal Servants, preserved in the late copy KUB 13.3 (i 20'ff.; Miller 2013, 81), we read for example: "... all you kitchen personnel ... shall swear an oath to the person of the king month for month!" And in their loyalty oath to Arnuwanda, Ašmu-Nikkal and the crown prince Tudhaliya, the town commanders must swear monthly to desire these royals as their rulers, to support no enemy, and to report insurrections and intrigues in the palace as well as various other types of sedition, and so forth and so on (Miller 2013, 199-203). One might plausibly argue that Tudhaliya IV's loyalty oaths seem particularly paranoiac, in which, as mentioned, he seems perhaps to have been influenced by his parents, but those of Šuppiluliu/ama II are again closer to the norm, and do not reflect the same level of fear and suspicion seen in the preceding two generations, at least as far as their miserable state

King following Šuppiluliu/ama II, which would of course leave unexplained, among other things, the second coronation of Tudhaliya IV and the apparent ritual burial of the Bronze Tablet.

of preservation allows one to judge.⁸ Moreover, these texts do not constitute evidence for unrest, only the fear of it, which is a potentially significant distinction. We have, in fact, apart from the issues of Urhi-Tešob and Kuruntiya just noted, no evidence for internal upheaval in the late period.⁹

Perhaps it was a neglect of this distinction that led Klinger to write (2007, 117), “Suppiluliuma II. war zwar nominell der letzte Großkönig, der in Hattusa herrschte, doch seine Stellung als alleiniger Herrscher des hethitischen Reiches war offenbar bereits in seiner engsten Umgebung sehr umstritten. Aus seiner Regierung hat sich die Eidesleistung eines hohen Beamten erhalten, der sich darüber beklagt, daß es angesichts der konkurrierenden Dynastielinien für die Untertanen kaum mehr zu entscheiden sei, wem eigentlich die Loyalität zu gelten habe”. As far as I am aware, however, there exists no such Eidesleistung. The only texts that mention “competing dynastic lines” are (1) instruction and oath compositions formulated by Tudhaliya IV, in which he warns his subordinates not to support anyone from any other royal lineage (CTH 255.1, §§3’-5’, 9”, 24””; 225.2, §§2, 25””; Miller 2013, 284-291, 296f., 302f.), and (2) the Oath of [Tagi’]-Šarruma,¹⁰ in which this official swears his loyalty to Šuppiluliu/ama and his progeny alone, refusing to countenance anyone from a competing line. [Tagi’]-Šarruma certainly does not complain, “daß es angesichts der konkurrierenden Dynastielinien für die Untertanen kaum mehr zu entscheiden sei, wem eigentlich die Loyalität zu gelten habe”. Further, it is,

⁸ A thorough comparison of the relevant texts obviously cannot be presented here. In a footnote to my treatment of Šuppiluliu/ama’s loyalty oath (Miller 2013, 410, n. 156), I noted that Singer (2009, 182-186) seems to extract from this text far more doom and gloom hinting at the collapse of the state than is warranted.

⁹ Incidentally, it seems to me that one should be sparing with the use of the popular term “civil war” when referring to the conflict between Hattušili III and Muršili III / Urhi-Tešob. Hattušili does claim that Urhi-Tešob opened hostilities against him and does essentially declare war when he calls for Šaušga of Šamuha and the Storm-God of Nerik to decide the conflict between himself and Urhi-Tešob (Apology iii 68-72; Otten 1981, 23). Still, as far as I am aware, there is no evidence that any battles were ever fought. Hattušili seems to have managed to have taken Urhi-Tešob prisoner without any military confrontation; at least none is mentioned (iv 30-32; *ibid.* 25). Whether he accomplished this by means of a covert operation or by an overwhelming show of force that Urhi-Tešob dared not to challenge is, perhaps intentionally, not made clear. Hattušili does state that he chose not to murder Urhi-Tešob secretly, but this must not necessarily exclude a secret operation to capture him (iii 66-68). Of course, as always, we are almost completely dependent on Hattušili’s selective and tendentious description of events.

¹⁰ No full edition of this text is available. For transliterations, partial translations and discussions see Giorgieri (1995, 278-280), Glocker (2009); Laroche (1953) and Giorgieri – Mora (1996, 62f.).

in my view, misleading to describe Šuppiluliu/ama as “zwar nominell” great king, but “in seiner engsten Umgebung sehr umstritten”. To my knowledge, there is no passage in any text that calls into question the exclusive right of Šuppiluliu/ama to reign as Great King. (On the Talmi-Tešob Treaty see below and n. 12.).

Of course, the battle of Nihriya seems to have very much shaken and shocked Tudhaliya IV, as evidenced in KBo 4.14, a letter to or treaty-like document with a subordinate in which Tudhaliya details his defeat at the hands of the Assyrians and his vassal’s failure to come to his aid; and if Tudhaliya in fact temporarily lost the throne to Kuruntiya, this must have done so as well, though nowhere is this documented as in the case of the Assyrian defeat. It seems, however, that relations with Assyria improved thereafter, and whether this trauma influenced his successors as well or had anything to do with some vague crisis of confidence that in turn contributed to the collapse of the empire, we simply do not know. Documentation from Hattuša and elsewhere does show that Hatti steadily lost territory east of the Euphrates, that is, the remains of Mittani or Hanigalbat, to Assyrian expansion beginning already with the reign of Muršili II. But again, whether this had anything to do with the collapse is another question entirely. Consolidation of an overextended empire can have negative or positive effects on its overall strength.

Also Singer’s statement (see above) relies heavily, it seems, on hindsight.¹¹ Here I will mention only three points. (1) It was regularly the case throughout Hittite history, not to mention the history of all other empires, that vassals would more or less openly defy or dupe their masters whenever they reckoned they could gain from it. The historical narrative concerning Tette and Zirtaya in Muršili’s Plague Prayer to the Divine Assembly (KUB 19.15++ iv¹; Miller 2008, 536 [here obv.[?] (I), before the recognition of the join with KUB 31.121++]) is a perfect illustration of the Great Kings’ recognition of this reality. And one need only compare the Amarna letters for further rich and entertaining evidence, concerning Abdi-Aširta for example, or the so-called Tawagalawa Letter for Piyama-radu’s antics, or the so-called Madduwatta Indictment for Madduwatta’s. (2) The

¹¹ Of course, all writing of history is done with the benefit of hindsight, and these comments are not intended to condemn the practice of attempting to find explanations for events found in the documentation. Still, it can be a constructive exercise to distinguish between what can be gleaned from the texts with the benefit of hindsight and what one might have extracted from them without this luxury.

ruler of an empire certainly can remain unaware of an impending collapse, even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Conversely, a ruler can be plagued by debilitating fear of catastrophe even when everything is humming along quite nicely. (3) A preoccupation with and significant investment in the ancestor cult is attested at least since Arnuwanda and Ašmu-Nikkal and certainly had its roots in the even more distant past. While such may not be “uncharacteristic of ominous times”, neither is it uncharacteristic of mundane times. One might argue that such may be more reflective of the psychology of the persons involved than of any higher risk of impending catastrophe. We see, for example, no heightened emphasis on the mortuary cult during the so-called concentric invasion and Tudhaliya’s and Šuppiluliuma’s retreat to Šamuha.

And two comments on Klengel’s (see above) assertions: (1) There is, as far as I am aware, nothing to suggest a “weitergehende Selbstständigkeit von Karkamiš” in the late period. It acted since its establishment as a subsidiary kingdom rather independently, but always remained loyal to Hattuša. As van den Hout has shown (2001, 219-220), there is also no evidence for the assumption that the King of Karkamiš had taken the title Great King before the fall of the empire or received it from Tudhaliya IV, as one finds in numerous studies. Further, *pace* Klengel (1999, 318), the loyalty oath of Talmi-Tešob vis-à-vis Šuppiluliu/ama II certainly does not indicate that Talmi-Tešob had been made into a “gleichberechtigten Vertragspartner des Šuppiluliuma II.”, nor does it point to his “weitgehende Unabhängigkeit” (Klinger 2007, 117). The King of Karkamiš remains, on the contrary, clearly subordinate, pledging his allegiance to his overlord.¹² (2) While one could

¹² A key passage in this text (KUB 26.33++ ii 1'-17'; d'Alfonso 2007, 212) is often restored to suggest that the king of Karkamiš plays king-maker, being responsible for the accession of Šuppiluliu/ama II (e.g. Singer 2001, 640; d'Alfonso 2007, 216f.). This interpretation is, however, quite dependent on the restorations one chooses to make, and is thus, though seemingly quite possible, to be treated with caution. Even if this is indeed the intent of the passage, however, it need not suggest any “weitergehende Selbstständigkeit von Karkamiš”. Assuming that there was some uncertainty in Hattuša about who the successor to the empire’s throne should have been upon the death of Arnuwanda III, as may perhaps have been the case as intimated in this text, it would be quite natural for a senior member of the royal family, such as the king of Karkamiš, to be involved in the decision making process. And while such a delicate state of affairs surely presents the opportunity for such a senior royal to take advantage of the situation, there is no evidence that this occurred. To the contrary, Talmi-Tešob emphatically swears that he acted in full conformity with the rules of succession in Hattuša. One should also be wary of assuming that ii 10' of this text indicates that the nobility of Hattuša rebelled or became disloyal, as implied by d'Alfonso’s (2007, 213) translation. The verb in question, *maršešš-*, might potentially mean ‘be(come) disloyal’, but its basic meaning is ‘to be(come) false’ (CHD L-N, 195b, 200), and in the context here

certainly dispute the details from other sites and the implications thereof,¹³ there is certainly no evidence from Hattuša for “ein Abrücken Ugarits und wohl auch anderer syrischer Fürstentümer von Ḫatti” in the last decades of the Empire, at least no more and no less than was always the case (cf. above).

One might argue that I am setting the bar for ascertaining causation too high. It can be, after all, very difficult to determine the causes of or factors contributing to important political, economic and social events even when well documented, and it is not particularly helpful to play the “dogmatic agnostic”. We still debate the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire or of the Soviet Union, for example, for which the documentation is far better, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is thus a fundamental epistemological question we are faced with.

Another way to think about the topic at hand is to ask: If we did not know that the Hittite state collapsed some time shortly after 1200 BCE, would we have been able to predict it, or at least suspect it, based on the textual material available to us? Granted, this may be too much to ask of an historian, but it is perhaps nonetheless worth posing the question and contemplating possible answers. Similarly, one might ask: If, given the textual material we have from Hattuša, but not knowing which attested events date to the end of the empire and which to earlier periods, what developments would we predict will have led to the collapse and disappearance of the empire? Few of us, I think, would have chosen the events dating to the period of Hattušili III, Tudhaliya IV and Šuppiluliuma II. Most of us probably would have chosen the concentric invasion during the reign of Tudhaliya III and the desperate attempts of this sickly king, aided by his son or son-in-law Šuppiluliuma I, who had, incidentally, murdered the heir to the

Talmi-Tešob might simply be saying that the “men of Hattuša” had been wrong or dishonest concerning the matter in question or concerning his involvement in it in particular, against which he seems thereafter perhaps to defend himself.

¹³ E.g. the implications of Ugarit’s request for artisans to fashion a statue of Merneptah for a new Baal temple and the pharaoh’s equivocal reply (RS 88.2158). Singer (1999, 711) leaves little room for doubt about his interpretation of these lines: “All in all, this exchange of letters can point to nothing less than a forthright overture to restore the traditional political ties between Egypt and Ugarit, notwithstanding the latter’s obligations towards her Hittite overlord. ... [S]uch a bold political move by Ugarit could hardly have been made a few generations earlier, and it is yet another indication for the waning reverence for Hittite authority in Syria”. Devecchi (2015), in contrast, has illustrated how Hittite vassals were allowed, even encouraged, to maintain profitable relations with countries that were at peace with Hatti.

throne, to regain their kingdom from their base in Šamuha. Or perhaps one might choose the disastrous plague years in Muršili II's reign, when a young king took the throne, mocked by his contemporaries and facing rebellions in Western Anatolia and in Syria, upon which Egypt also had its eye.

Paradoxically, one might choose these periods precisely because of the well-documented troubles. But what about those periods in which, for whatever reasons, the Hittite state produced – or for which we have found – hardly any documentation at all, such as in the generations preceding and succeeding Telipinu? Surely, based on the almost total lack of textual production during these periods, one could assume that the state was on its last legs, or at least in the doldrums? But, probably none or only a few of us would have chosen these periods, because they do not attract our attention with documentation of their dire events.

To summarize, one finds little or no evidence in the textual documentation from Hattuša that clearly points to the decline of the state or the fall of the empire. To the contrary, if one did not know that Šuppiluliu/ama II was the last ruler of a doomed kingdom, one might even conclude from the texts from Hattuša that Hatti had reached a new zenith, an unprecedented period of power and prosperity. With the worries about Urhi-Tešob and Kuruntiya a thing of the past, Šuppiluliu/ama II is witnessed as dedicating considerable resources to the ancestor cult for his father, such as the Yazılıkaya complex and the consecration of a statue with an annalistic inscription in an “eternal rock sanctuary”. His Instructions and Oath Imposition for the Men of Hattuša attests, moreover, to his ability to exempt a further major institution for the ancestor cult, a “house of the dead”, from taxes and corvee (ABoT 1.56 iii 4'-22'; Miller 2013, 311-313), so that it appears that the state was not short on cash. During Šuppiluliu/ama's reign Hatti seems to have become a sea power to some degree for the first time, having won a naval battle off the coast of Cyprus. Šuppiluliu/ama also ruled over Alašiya – if KBo 12.38 and KBo 12.39 are to be dated and/or understood as indicating such –, which is not attested since the days of Arnuwanda I (KUB 14.1+ rev. 84-90). Unprecedented monumental works were created and/or renovated in Hattuša, such as Yazılıkaya, Nišantepe and perhaps Südburg.¹⁴ At least as late as the reign of Tudhaliya Hatti seems to

¹⁴ Indeed, as Amir Gilan pointed out to me (email of 11.7.19), “the evidence left by Suppi(luliu/ama) II actually suggests that the Hittites believed in a future! Why else erect a statue of Tud(haliya) IV with an inscription written for future audiences, or erect the Südburg?”.

have had full control of the west, including Mira and Lukka. Both Tudhaliya and Šuppiluliu/ama corresponded with their vassals and with other Great Kings, as had their predecessors.

As to the question of why the texts from Hattuša do not seem to document its decline, some considerations expressed by Bittel, Seeher and Schachner might point us in the right direction. They have suggested that by the time some of the major structures in Hattuša were burned the royal court had already abandoned the city, having previously emptied them of their most valuable contents (e.g. Bittel 1983, 26f., 34; Seeher 2001, 623; Schachner 2011, 112f.). If so, then perhaps the last years or decades of decline are not documented in the texts from Hattuša because it was no longer serving as the administrative centre of the empire. We do not know when during the reign of Šuppiluliu/ama II our documentation from Hattuša ceases. It could be in his 5th year, it could be in his 20th year, or even following his reign. It may have occurred rather slowly, it may have happened quite suddenly. Either way, the synchronisation and correlation of the events in the textual documentation from Hattuša with the archaeological evidence and the textual material from elsewhere remain a major challenge for further research.

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