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On the Word for “Silver” with Reference to Hittite Cuneiform Texts

When the first Hittite cuneiform texts from the Boğazköy archives were published, it became clear that the Hittite scribes had never used the syllabic spelling of a Hittite word for ‘silver’: they had accepted the Sumerogram KÙ.BABBAR- ‘silver’ (Akkadian: *kaspum*) instead which obviously concealed the Hittite-Luwian or Hattian (Proto-Hittite) and, possibly, Hurrian (*ušhu*) word for this metal. All attempts to find out the exact Hittite or any other sound analogue for the word have been in vain; there was an idea suggested by H. Hoffner, implying that it could have been the Hittite word *harki*-¹, ‘white metal’, by analogy with other languages in which ‘silver’ was named with reference to its white colour.²

Meanwhile, it had been noticed since the very beginning of hittitology that the name of the Hittite capital URUḪattuša and URUḪatti used to be spelled with the help of the above mentioned Sumerogram KÙ.BABBAR- ‘silver’ in the form URUKÙ.BABBAR, which was often used with phonetic complements such as URUKÙ.BABBAR-ša or URUKÙ.BABBAR-ti, i.e., URUḪattuša and URUḪatti, respectively. According to a presumptively Hattian origin of these city names, some authors have inferred that **hattu(š)-*, **hatt-* was the Hattian word for ‘silver’³ and the word for ‘silver’ served as the basis from which the city name Hattusa was derived. However, the latter meaning of the word **hatt-* has not yet been found in the Boğazköy archives, thus leaving unsolved those puzzling spellings of the names of the Hittite capital.⁴ Why then did the scribes use the Sumerogram

¹ H. A. Hoffner, An English-Hittite Glossary, in: RHA 25, fasc. 80 [1967], 80 n. 154; idem, A Hittite Text in Epic Style about Merchants, in: JCS 22 [1968–1969], 41. H. A. Hoffner notices DINGIR *LM-aš* KÙ.BABBAR-*i* – „silver of deity” (KBo I 42 IV 9) where KÙ.BABBAR-*i*, spelled with a phonetic complement, is a form of the Nominative case, neuter gender, rather than Dative (Locative). Therefore, in this case the Hittite word for “silver” was a word with a root ending in *-i*-, i.e., possibly, *harki*- white (metal)”.

² H. Hoffner’s idea has been supported by a number of authors; e.g., J. Tischler, Hethitisch-deutsches Wörterverzeichnis, Innsbruck 1982, 120; V. V. Ivanov, The History of Slavonic and Balkan Names for Metals, Moscow 1983, 105 (in Russian); T. V. Gamkrelidze – V. V. Ivanov, Indoeuropean Languages and the Indoeuropeans, vol. II, Tbilisi 1984, 713 (in Russian); *harki*- is translated as “silver” in other studies, too.

³ J. Friedrich, Hethitisches Wörterbuch (HW¹), Heidelberg 1952, 67, 281, 316 (references here).

⁴ HW¹ 316; E. Laroche, Études de linguistique anatolienne, in: RHA 24, fasc. 79 [1966], 175; Hoffner RHA 25, 80 n. 154.

for 'silver' to render the name of the Hittite capital? Which language was it in which the word with the root **hatt-* meant this metal?⁵

Although the Hittite texts have not preserved the syllabic spelling of the Hittite word for 'silver', they are known to possess different case inflections of the word formed with the help of some phonetic complements that follow the Sumerogram KÙ.BABBAR. This makes quite a curious picture: judging from these complements so far unjustly ignored by scholars the texts have preserved the stem endings of at least three different words for 'silver', not counting the Akkadian word *kaspum*. It can be therefore supposed that the Sumerogram KÙ.BABBAR conceals the word for 'silver' either of Hittite, Luwian, Hattian or, possibly, Hurrian origin.⁶

Considering the spellings KÙ.BABBAR-*an-za* (Nominative case, sing.)⁷ and KÙ.BABBAR-*an-ti* (Dative case, sing.)⁸, it seems undisputable that the word for 'silver' concealed in the ideogram has a stem ending in *-nt-*, i.e., KÙ.BABBAR-*ant-*⁹. As we know, such stems are of Hittite (or Luwian) origin. In fact, the forms *-anza* and *-anti* are the endings of the Nominative and Dative cases, singular. Here they represent the proper name of a man called „Silver“ in a Hurrian myth¹⁰; however, this personification of silver¹¹ does not change the fact that the Hittite translation of the Hurrian ritual would render the man's name Silver through the Hittite word for 'silver' with the *-nt-* stem (in Hurrian the man's name would be *Ušhu* – „Silver“).¹² Accepting H. Hoffner's above mentioned suggestion that the Hittite name for 'silver' might have been associated with the white colour (Hittite: *harki-*) of the metal, it is quite possible to restore the word **harkant-* (*harkiyant-*) for 'silver' in accordance with the spelling of KÙ.BABBAR-*ant-*. In this case such a form can be compared with some Indoeuropean words for 'silver', in the first place, with Latin *argentum* and others.¹³

⁵ Both phonetically and semantically the word **hatt-* resembles the Egyptian word for "silver", i.e., *ḥd*; however, it seems hardly possible that this word served as the basis of the toponym ^{URU}*Hattu(š)* or ^{URU}*Hatti*, which is thought to be of Hattian origin. Most possibly the word **hatt-* is Hattian, and it is likewise possible that it meant "white (metal)".

⁶ It is known that in Hittite texts a Sumerogram may stand for a Hittite as well as for a Luwian word identifiable only by the phonetic complement that follows the ideogram. E.g., the spelling LÚ-*aš* "man" implies the Hittite word *antuḥšaš*, and LÚ-*iš* the Luwian word *zitiš*. Thus, for instance, *IR-aš* and *IR-iš* ("slave"; "servant"; "unfree") are concealing a Hittite and, obviously, a Luwian word of the same meaning.

⁷ KUB XVII 4:2, 8; XXXIII 115 IV 2; XXXVI 19:9.

⁸ KUB XXXVI 18 II 7.

⁹ Like the words *išpant-* "night", *udneant-* "country", *ḫumant-* "all", "every", "whole", etc. [see J. Friedrich, *Hethitisches Elementarbuch*, 1. Teil: Kurzgefaßte Grammatik (HE I, Heidelberg 1960, 53, § 77 (81)], which take the ending *-anza* in the Nominative case, singular.

¹⁰ E. Laroche, *Textes mythologiques hittites en transcription*, 2. Mythologie d'origine étrangère, XVIII. Mythe de l'„Argent“, in: RHA 26, fasc. 82 [1968], 63 [177] – 68 [182].

¹¹ E. von Schuler, in: H. W. Haussig (ed.), *Götter und Mythen im Vorderen Orient*, Stuttgart 1965 (*Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, 1. Abteilung, Bd. I), 196.

¹² It is hardly possible that, as E. Laroche suggests (Laroche, RHA 24, 175), there is a Hittite suffixation (*-ant-*) of a word of non-Hittite origin in that story.

¹³ For the names of "silver" in different Indoeuropean languages cf. Gamkrelidze – Ivanov 713.

Judging by the spelling KÜ.BABBAR-*ni*¹⁴, the word for 'silver' which it conceals is a word with the Dative case ending -*ni*. This means that it is a word with a stem ending in -*a*¹⁵, -*n*¹⁶, or -*r/n*- with ablaut¹⁷, or it is an abstract word with the ending -*atar*, -*tar*, -*eššar*, -*war*, -*mar* or the like.¹⁸ It is known that only such words can show the above mentioned case ending in the Dative, singular. It might have been a word of Luwian origin or, possibly, according to E. Laroche, a Hurrian word *ušhu* (**ušhuni* in the Dative).¹⁹

The forms KÜ.BABBAR-*yaš* (Genetive case, sing.)²⁰, KÜ.BABBAR-*i* (Dative case, sing.)²¹ and KÜ.BABBAR-*ya* (also Dative, sing.)²² attested in the texts make it possible to assume the existence of a word for 'silver' possessing the stem -*i*- (a fact mentioned in literature). Its Genetive case, singular, had the ending -*yaš* (occasionally, -*aš*)²³, and its Dative, singular, -*i*, or -*ya* (-*ai*). This word is of the *halki*-, *huwaši*-, *šalli*-, *šuppi*- type or a similar one.²⁴ According to H. Hoffner, this word can with good reason be restored as **harki*- (see above n. 1), especially as H. Hoffner observes the ending of the Nominative case, neuter gender, (in place of the Dative) in one instance (KÜ.BABBAR-*i*).²⁵ However, taking into consideration H. Hoffner's idea suggesting the white colour of the metal as the basis for the Hittite name of 'silver', we find it more justified to give preference to the above restored form **harkant*- (**harkiyant*-) for the Hittite word 'silver', although one may assume a simultaneous usage of **harki*-.

Thus, if the presumptions are true, then the ideographic writing of KÜ.BABBAR implies the existence of different words for 'silver', most probably of different origins. We suppose that they include one more word for 'silver' which is clearly of non-Hittite origin. This conclusion is drawn from the data on an archaic ritual discussed below.

The ritual in which the Sun-Goddess and the Weather-God take part – KBo XXI 22 (CTH 820, 4)²⁶ and which contains wishes of long life to *labarna*, the king and *tawananna*, the queen (lines 18–20), ends with the following passage:

(41) IŠKUR-*aš wa-at-ta-ru i-an-zi nu-wa wa-at-ta-ru ma-a-aḥ-ḥa-an i-ya-an*

¹⁴ KBo V 2 IV 61.

¹⁵ Like *aruna*-, *anna*-, *aralyzena*-, *kunna*-, etc., cf. HE I §§ 64 (69), 65 (70). It has the ending -*an* in the Accusative, sing.: KÜ.BABBAR-*an* (KUB XXXV 52:8).

¹⁶ See such words as *šahḫan*, *laman*, *tekan*, etc., cf. HE I § 78 (82).

¹⁷ Like *uttar*, *ešḫar*, *lammar*, etc., cf. HE I § 82 (86).

¹⁸ HE §§ 83 (87), 84 (88), 85 (89), 86 (90), 88 (92a).

¹⁹ Laroche, RHA 24, 175. For *ušhu* see also G. A. Melikishvili, On some names of metals in ancient Oriental and Caucasian languages, in: VDI 1968/4, 126 (in Russian), and I. M. Diakonoff, Hurrisch und Urartäisch, München 1971, 167. Both authors suppose a relationship between *ušhu* and Georgian *wercxl*- "silver".

²⁰ KUB XXXII 128 II 4–7.

²¹ KUB VIII 35 obv. 14; XVII 4:3; XXXVI 19:11', 12'; IBoT II 121 rev. 16.

²² KBo V 2 IV 55; HW¹ 281.

²³ KÜ.BABBAR-*aš*: KBo X 31 II 13, IV 32 and others.

²⁴ HE I §§ 66 (70), 71 (75), etc.

²⁵ KBo I 42 IV 9.

²⁶ Transliteration and Italian translation of the text and comments by A. Archi, Auguri per il Labarna, in: O. Carruba (ed.), *Studia Mediterranea* Piero Meriggi dicata, Pavia 1979, 45 ff. For some passages from KBo XXI 22 see V. G. Ardzinba, *Rituals and myths of ancient Anatolia*, Moscow 1982, 106 (in Russian).

(42) *ku-un-na-ni-ta-at ú-e-da-an ar-zi-li-ta-at ha-ni-iš-ša-a-an* (43) AN.BAR-at *iš-ki-ya-an* . . .²⁷

"(41) The spring of the Weather-God they make and (say): 'As soon as the spring (will be) made, (42) it (will be) built with copper, (with the help of) *arzili*- it (will be) plastered, (43) with iron it (will be) smeared . . .'.²⁸"

The word written in the form *arzilitat* is the only word in this passage the meaning of which is unknown. Here the stem of the word is distinguishable: *arzil-* or *arzili-* (or *arzila-*) which takes the ending of the Instrumental case *-it* and the personal pronoun *-at* – 'he, she, it'. This word with the stem ending in *-l* (or *-a*) does not occur in other Hittite texts. This makes it difficult to find out its meaning which must be drawn, in the first place, from that passage of the ritual.

Referring to the context under consideration, A. Kammenhuber suggests that *arzila/li-* means some plastering stuff.²⁹ This presumption seems to be based on the text itself, where the word is used in connection with the verb *haneš(š)-*, *haniš(š)-* – "to plaster"³⁰. This idea is supported also by J. Tischler, who in his Hittite-German word index defines the word as "plastering stuff", implying clay or silt/slime.³¹ According to J. Siegelová, the word *arzil-* (*arzili/a-*) means a kind of mortar (with a question mark)³², while V. Haas thinks it is the name of a stone and identifies it with the word *arzallu* recorded in the Akkadian "Materia magica".³³

A. Archi suggests a different meaning of the word under consideration, defining it as "bronze" (with a question mark).³⁴ However, he has not provided any relevant arguments to prove his opinion that the text implies a metal.

²⁷ Transliteration and German translation of the lines in J. Friedrich – A. Kammenhuber, *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*. Zweite, völlig neubearbeitete Auflage auf der Grundlage der edierten hethitischen Texte (HW²), Lfg. 5, Heidelberg 1980, 366, and J. Siegelová, *Gewinnung und Verarbeitung von Eisen im Hethitischen Reich im 2. Jahrtausend v. u. Z.*, Prague 1984 (*Annals of the Náprstek Museum*, vol. 12), 84. For the English translation see H. G. Güterbock – H. A. Hoffner (eds.), *The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (CHD)*, vol. 3, fasc. 2, Chicago 1983, 106.

²⁸ The Hittite word *kunnan-* (= *kuwanna*) "copper" (l. 42) is not translated by A. Kammenhuber (HW² 366) although its meaning is certainly very familiar to the researchers (see, e.g., Tischler 120). The Sumerogram AN.BAR-*at* implies the Hittite form *hapalkitat*, i.e. *hapalkit* "with iron" + *at* "he" (the spring of the Weather-God). Cf. KUB XXIX 1 III 40 and HT 38 II 12, concerning the correspondence between AN.BAR-*at* and *hapalkit*.

²⁹ HW² 365.

³⁰ According to Hittite texts, the walls of some buildings were plastered with clay (*wilan-*): *ne-e-u-it ú-i-la-ni-it ha-ni-iš-ša-an-du* "let them plaster with new clay"; see E. v. Schuler, *Hethitische Dienstanweisungen*, Graz 1957, 45, 55. Besides, *purut-* "lime, mortar, clay" (HW¹ 174) was also used for plastering.

³¹ Tischler 8, 120.

³² Siegelová 84.

³³ V. Haas, *Hethitische Berggötter und hurritische Steindämonen*, Mainz 1982, 181. – However, we think this identification is hardly possible. A. Kammenhuber, J. Tischler, and J. Siegelová also seem to exclude the association of *arzil-* with *arzallu* (*arazallu*), denoting some plant, stone, tool or precious thing (CAD A_{II} 324ff.; AHw 73) and they don't refer to this Akkadian word. Whenever *arzallu* means a kind of stone in Akkadian texts it goes as a rule with the determinative NA₄ "stone" which is absent before *arzil-* in Hittite texts. Hence it follows that *arzil-* is not "stone". Thus, the Akkadian word is close to the Hittite one in sound rather than in meaning.

³⁴ Archi 47.

As to this passage we, too, find it more plausible that the word *arzil-/i-/a-* (*arzil-* in what follows) is a name of a metal, although not of bronze, since the latter is known to be denoted by the Hittite word *ḫarašu*³⁵. The most forcible proof is, in our opinion, the occurrence of *arzil-* particularly together with such metals as copper (*kunnan-*) and iron (AN.BAR = *ḫapalki-*). There is little probability that it indicates any building stone (or a kind of mortar) since it lacks the ideogram NA₄ "stone". The passage is most likely to include only the name of metals.

No argument against this presumption should be drawn from the close relationship observed between the noun *arzil-* and the verb *ḫaneš(š)-*, *ḫaniš(š)-* meaning "to plaster". This, of course, cannot prove that the word denotes a plastering stuff. The passage under discussion names copper as a building material (see line 42: "it (will be) built with copper") although it is not. According to the same passage iron is used as a material for "smearing" (see line 43: "it (will be) smeared with iron"), in spite of the absolute unfitness of this metal for this purpose.³⁶

In view of what has been said above there is no doubt that in the most ancient Hittite ritual a magic power is attached to metals, at least, with certainty, to copper and iron during the construction of a spring for the Weather-God. Therefore, it should not cause any perplexity that *arzil-* (i.e., a certain metal, as we shall try to prove below) was also endowed with magic power owing to which it seems to be applicable as a plastering material.

If only metals are listed in the above mentioned passage, then naturally the following question arises: Which metal exactly does the word *arzil-* stand for?

It is clear that the word does not mean any of the metals for which the Hittite or Hattian names are known, i.e., copper (Hitt.: *kuwannan-*, *kunnan-*, possibly, Hatt.: *šinīti*), iron (Hatt. and Hitt.: *ḫapalki-*), bronze (Hitt.: *ḫarašu-*), tin (Hitt.: *dankui-*), lead (Hitt.: *šulīya-*, *šulai-*).³⁷ It is not the Hittite word for "silver" either, if we accept H. Hoffner's suggestion that the Hittite word was probably *ḫurki-*, and even if our suggestion to reconstruct such a word in the form **ḫarkant-* seems plausible (see above), the meaning of "silver" for these words has not yet been proved by any evidence. It cannot be the Hattian word for "silver" either. However, it may be the Hittite or Hattian word for "gold"³⁸, the Hattian name of "bronze" "tin", "lead" etc., that is, a word for one of the metals the names of which we do not know yet. But there is still another possibility. We shall try to

³⁵ Laroche, RHA 24, 181; Hoffner, RHA 25, 29; Tischler 120.

³⁶ According to a Hittite text on construction work (KUB XXIX 1 III 39f.) copper and iron were used in their "ordinary" meaning for the finishing of a ritual hearth: (39) DINGIR^{MEŠ}_{wa} KI.NE *da-a-ir nu-wa-ra-an ku-un-na-ni-it* (40) *ḫu-ū-ra-i-ir na-an* AN. BAR-*it ša-an-ni-i-ir* "(39) Gods put up the hearth and with copper they (40) decorated it and with iron covered it". See Siegelová 85 and I. M. Tatishvili, The Hittite ritual of putting up a hearth (KUB XXIX 1 III 37 – IV 29), in: Archaeological Proceedings, Tbilisi 1985, 144 (in Georgian).

³⁷ On the names of these metals cf. the above mentioned studies by H. A. Hoffner, E. Laroche, J. Tischler, T. V. Gamkrelidze, and V. V. Ivanov.

³⁸ The word *kurupšeni* is supposed to mean gold of a low quality.

show that the word *arzil-* can be regarded as the name for “silver” of a still questionable origin.

While searching for the meaning of *arzil-* our attention is drawn primarily to its phonetic resemblance with a number of words for “silver” in the Kartvelian and North Caucasian languages.

First of all, the stem of the word *arzil-* can be compared with the common Kartvelian stem **wercxl-* (“silver”), i.e., the Georgian stem *wercxl-* and, particularly, the Megrelian stem *warcxl-* (“silver”)³⁹, especially since in the Kartvelian stems the initial **w* and the **x* are of later secondary origin (adopted from some other language). In this case the phonetic compositions of the words under study obviously come close to each other. But one may assume a reverse process as well, i. e., the loss of the initial **w* and of **x* in the word *arzil-* owing to its adoption from the Kartvelian languages. If this is true, then the original source of the word *arzil-* must have been the Kartvelian languages.

In connection with the word *arzil-* quite interesting parallels can be found in the North Caucasian languages, particularly in Nah-Daghestan and Abkhaz. Thus, “silver” is presented as *arc* (pronounced /arts/) in the Darghin language, *arcu* /artsu/ in the Lak language, *ars* and *arsu* in Tabasaran and Agul (also in Godoberin and Botlikh), respectively, *arsi* in Archin, *orsi* in Andy.⁴⁰ The stem *arzil-* can also be related to the Abkhaz word *a-raʒn* and Avar *warac* for “silver”.⁴¹ In this case the original source of *arzil-* must have been already the North Caucasian languages. The above listed words from the North-Caucasian languages which are lacking *-l* at the end of the stem (different from the common Kartvelian stem preserving the *-l*) are regarded in literature as analogous with the primary Indoeuropean word **Hark’-* for “silver”, to which also the root **arz-* may go back. In the light of the latest data on the genetic relations of the North-Caucasian languages with Hattian⁴², our comparisons do not exclude relationship with the Hattian world. Especially the phonetic composition of *arzil-* reveals an affinity with the Hattian vocabulary, with words comprising the suffix *-il*, in particular: *-razzil-* “earth” (as part of the compound word *ištarazzil-* “black earth”) *bikaššil*, *pipizil-* “storm, rainfall”, *wazaril*, etc.⁴³

Our assumption concerning *arzil-* “silver” would prove complete only if the Hittite texts produced an analogy of syllabic writing with the ideogram KÜ.BAB-BAR, or if this ideogram showed phonetic complements comprising at least the root end consonant *-l*, **KÜ.BABBAR-li-it*⁴⁴ “with silver” (Instrumental case,

³⁹ A. S. Chikobava, The oldest structure of name stems in the Kartvelian languages, Tbilisi 1942, 51 (in Georgian); G. A. Klimov, Etymological dictionary of Kartvelian languages, Tbilisi 1964, 83 (in Russian); Gamkrelidze – Ivanov 713.

⁴⁰ A. K. Shagirov, Etymological dictionary of the Adyg (Cherkez) languages, Moscow 1977, 156 (in Russian); Gamkrelidze – Ivanov 713 with n. 2; S. A. Starostin, Cultural vocabulary in the General North Caucasian lexical fund, in: Ancient Anatolia, Moscow 1985, 83 (in Russian).

⁴¹ Shagirov 156. Cf. also Armenian *arcat* “silver”.

⁴² V. V. Ivanov, On the relation of the Hattian to the North-Caucasian languages, in: Ancient Anatolia, Moscow 1985, 26 (in Russian).

⁴³ Ivanov, The history of Slavonic . . . 118, 129, 130, 138.

⁴⁴ Hittite texts have preserved the form KÜ.BABBAR-*it* (KBo XXIII 52 II 11, cf. HW² 327), however, it does not reveal the root end consonant for the word “silver”.

singular), *KÛ.BABBAR-*li-ya-aš** “of silver” (Genetive case, singular), *KÛ.BABBAR-*li*⁴⁵ “to silver” (Dative case, singular), etc.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See HE § 71 (75) for the declination of this kind of word with the root end consonant *-l-* (*karuili-*).

⁴⁶ The following considerations to which T. V. Gamkrelidze and M. K. Andronikashvili drew our attention affirm our suggestion concerning the word *arzi-* for “silver”. As the root *arzi-* of the word *arzi-* (*-l* being isolated from the word as a suffix) can be associated with the Hittite word *ḫarki-* “white” (the laryngeal phoneme *ḫ* being lost in *arzi-*), **arzi-* and *ḫarki-* can be regarded as the same words formed in accordance with the rules of the satəm and centum languages, respectively. In this case, the meaning of **arzi* = “white” and, consequently, of *arzi-* “silver” seems to be certain. As for **ḫattu(š)-ḫatt-*, this word can be still considered the Hattian equivalent of “silver”. It may be encountered with the Boğazköy archives in future.