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DEATH AND THE HITTITE KING

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The Indo-European component in Hittite culture is not large. Nevertheless, continuing research has shown that the Hittites did retain certain significant aspects of inherited PIE institutions.¹ Professor Polomé, the honoree of this volume, has himself provided examples through his comparison of Hitt. *ḫaḫḫu-* 'king' with Gmc. **sneuz* and Hitt. *tuwya-* 'assembly' with the family of OIce. *þulr* 'orator'.

One area where societies are notably conservative is in their views on death and afterlife and in their funeral customs. Puhvel (1969a) and (1969b) 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 inalienable pasture.

Both of these concepts are attested in our principal Hittite text on death and afterlife, the royal funeral rites (see Otten, 1959). While the expression 'become a god' may be restricted to the Hittite king, the recent study by Archi (1979) suggests that other members of the population were also accorded a status after death comparable to that of the Roman *mānā*. 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 (Gurney, 1981: 168), but its full significance has not been appreciated.

The Testament is available in a full edition by F. Sommer and A. Falkenstein (1938). This edition is rightly regarded as a landmark in the field, and I do not wish to dispute its overall very high quality. Nevertheless, no work of scholarship may be regarded as sacrosanct, and the present case is no exception. In particular, I defy anyone to make coherent sense of the authors' German translation of the final paragraph (§23) of the text (1938: 16f).

The fundamental problem is their assumption that the final attested paragraph forms part of the official testament (see their explicit acknowledgment of the difficulties, 1938: 190). As shown by the text itself, this assumption is erroneous. The provisions of the testament actually end with §21. The following §22 merely admonishes 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 heir is to have the words of the testament read to him monthly, and he is to 'impress' the words on his heart.²

With this final admonition the testament, the official document, is complete. What then is the following paragraph §23? 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 quiet the distraught king. In the confusion, the scribe's indiscretion in recording all of this is overlooked, and this account is included in the official document and even duly translated into Akkadian. Viewed in this light, the highly emotional and disjointed nature of the text of §23 makes sense.⁴

KUB I 16 III 64-73:

LUGAL.GAL (a-ba-ar-na-aš A-NA SAL ḫa-ba-aš-ta-ga-ar me-mi-iš-
ki-i-iz-zi
le-e-ma-mu-ud-ša-an pa-aš-ku-i-ā-ta le-e-ma-an-še
[LUGAL-ud ki-iš-ša-an te-ez-zi DUMU.MES.É.GAL-ša da-ra-
an-zi
[ka-a]-ša-wa-aš SAL.MEŠSU.GI-ud pu-nu-ud-ki-iš-zi LUGAL-ša-
aš-[ma-aš]
[ki-iš-še]-an te-ez-zi ki-nu-un-wa-aš nu-u-wa SAL.MEŠSU.GI-[ud]
[pu-nu-ud-ki-iš-iz]-zi U-UL ša-ag-ga-ab-bi nam-ma-mu-ud-
ša-a-a(n)
[le-e]-pa-aš-ku-i-ā-ta [le]-e EGIR-pa-mu-za pu-nu-ud-ki-
[nu-ud-ta] ud-da-a-ar-m[le]-eβ ša-a-ki]-iš-ki-mi SIG₅-an-zi-zi-
ma qf-rj
šag-ga-ni-ga-ta-mu-za-pa an-d(a bar-ak) nu-mu tág-ga-ni-
/ / ták-na-aš pa-ab- / -šj

'The great king, the labarna, keeps speaking to Ḫaštayar: "Do not forsake me!" (In order) that the king may not say thus to her, the palace officials say: "Look, she is interrogating the 'old women' (i.e. soothsayers)." The king says thus [to them]: "She is still now interrogating the soothsayers? Don't I know?—Do not then 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 66: the precise meaning of *paškuwe-* is still not determined, but all occurrences point either to 'reject, drive away' or 'forsake, abandon, forget'. See Götz-Pedersen (1934: 20&63), Friedrich (1952: 165), Krotasser (1966: 481) and Oettinger (1979: 334). Contra Sommer and Falkenstein (1938: 190), the corresponding Akkadian verb is best assigned to *naparkû*

(*neperkiš*) in the sense 'leave, go away from': see the first two references above and also Reiner (1980a: 281).

line 65: *-še...tezi*. This cannot mean 'speaks of her', contra Sommer (1938: 191). All the alleged examples he cites with *-ms* are accusative, and even these do not mean 'speak of me', but rather represent the Hittite form of indirect speech. The dative enclitic *-še* plus *tezi* can only mean 'says to her', as already shown by the preceding ANA *SALḫastayar memaššazi*, which is taken as 'speaks to H.' even by Sommer. She is not present, of course, but that is no valid objection. The whole point of the passage is that the king in his distress is crying out for her succor in a context where her mere presence would be inappropriate.

lines 65–66: the clause *šē=man=še...tezi*, with the prohibitive negative and the optative particle *man*, expresses a wish, namely that the king not speak in this manner. Since the wish clearly is not that of the king, I take it to be that of the palace officials, who react accordingly. I translate with a negative purpose clause, something which so far as we know Hittite would have had no other way of expressing. If one finds this too bold, one could alternatively take the wish as an editorial comment of the scribe, but even then he would surely be voicing a common sentiment. What I insist on is 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 *-emas* 'to them' rather than *-še* 'to her' (with Sommer and Falkenstein) because in the next sentence the king refers to Ḫastayar in the third person (the restored verb is assured by the Akkadian). This would make no sense if the king were already speaking to Ḫastayar again.

lines 68–69: I find it most natural to take the king's second sentence as well as the first as a question. What remains unclear is whether we should understand the second sentence with the first ('Don't I know that she is still now interrogating the soothsayers?'), or with what follows ('Don't I know (anything)?—Interrogate me!'). The fact that the following sentence is directed once again at Ḫastayar argues for the former.

lines 72–73: This correct translation was given already by Götze (1922: 183). Sommer (1938: 199) rejects this on the absurdly hyper-rational grounds that it is impossible for a woman to save a man from death! Obviously, this is entirely irrelevant to a dying man terrified of death. Having rejected the only natural interpretation, Sommer must take the ablative *takmar* as an instrumental: 'protect me on your bosom with the earth!'. Since this is manifest nonsense, he must then in totally ad hoc fashion turn this into 'On your bosom bury 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 into the ground. Also false is the objection that the corresponding Akkadian *ma eššetim eynani* cannot mean 'protect me from the earth' (Sommer and Falkenstein, 1938: 199). Akkadian does not regularly indicate with *maḡāru* that from which one is to be protected, but

the construction does occur, and with *ina*: see the example *raman=guns ina ḫišu ʔa-ra-a* 'Protect yourselves from sin!' cited by Reiner (1980b: 38) sub *naḡāru*, 3c. Since *ina* is used frequently in Akkadian to indicate 'place from' with other verbs (Oppenheim, 1960: 141f), its use here to render a Hittite ablative seems quite unremarkable.

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. It would not be at all surprising if the king, relaxing from this supreme effort, suffered an attack or felt himself take a turn for the worse. In any case, Ḫastušili cries out for the aid of the woman Ḫastayar, who is evidently not present. The identity of Ḫastayar is not yet determined: she may be the king's wife, his mother, or (pace Sommer and Falkenstein, 1938: 189!) his favorite concubine. If we choose the last possibility, we may easily understand the embarrassment of the assembled courtiers. However, the assumption is by no means necessary. To witness publicly the mighty king of the Hittites crying out pathetically for a woman's aid would surely have been embarrassing enough.

The embarrassed members of the court try to quiet the king by telling him that Ḫastayar is busy consulting the soothsayers, presumably on his account. Mention of the soothsayers breaks into the king's consciousness, but only momentarily. Responding briefly to the officials, he then takes the idea of looking for signs and turns again at once to Ḫastayar, 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 then 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, but I believe we must be cautious on this point. Cremation does not preclude washing and other preparation of the body, and the fact that the king does not mention fire means little. This single text certainly seems a very slim basis for the conclusion of Gurney (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 MacQueen, 1975: 130ff, with refs.). While the attested manuscripts are Neo-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: 730). 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 this 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 Telipinu, the concept must be Old Hittite. As mentioned above, the evidence presented by Puhvel (1989a) and (1989b) 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 Hattusili 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. Hattusili's words speak to us directly across the centuries. His fear is palpable. We not only at 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.

NOTES

¹See for example Watkins (1989: 789ff) with references.

²For the phraseology of both of these provisions see Sommer-Falkenstein, 1938: 178f. As the authors correctly insist (1938: 186), the final charge to Mursili 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.

³Gurney (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 contend is found in the final paragraph.

⁴For the establishment of the Hittite text I refer the reader to Sommer and Falkenstein (1938: 188-190), 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: 202f). Readers should know that the Akkadian is the basis for most of the authors' restorations of the Hittite.

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