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Sargon and Naram-Sin in Ḫatti: Reflections of Mesopotamian Antiquity among the Hittites

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In the early seventeenth century BC the Hittites united the squabbling polities of central Anatolia to create the first state in the region. By around 1350 this polity, known as Ḫatti, had come to dominate much of northern Syria as well. Many different peoples were subject to the empire of the Hittites, and it is perhaps not anachronistic to speak of Ḫatti as a multicultural civilization.¹ The founders of the state were of Indo-European origin, and their language remained in use for administrative purposes until Ḫatti disappeared at the close of the Late Bronze Age (c. 1180 BC). Several other Indo-European languages, most prominently Palaic and Luwian, were also spoken in second millennium Anatolia, and the latter may indeed have become the vernacular of Ḫatti during the final decades of her history.²

The Hittite ruling class also adopted many religious and cultural elements from the Hattic people who had preceded them as lords of central Anatolia. The Hattic language, which cannot be connected with certainty to any other, lived on in certain religious contexts, and also provided many loanwords to Hittite.³ Another people over whom the Hittites ruled were the Hurrians, whose language is distantly related to tongues still spoken in the Caucasus today. The Hurrian contribution to Hittite civilization lay chiefly in the area of religion.

¹ On language usage in Ḫatti, see Gary Beckman, "The Hittite Language and its Decipherment," *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 31 (1996), 23-24.

² For recent accounts of Hittite history, see Horst Klengel, *Geschichte des Hethitischen Reiches* (Leiden, 1999), and Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford, 1998).

³ Hattic contributions to Hittite culture are discussed by Jörg Klinger, *Untersuchungen zur Rekonstruktion der hattischen Kultschicht* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 16-39.

Indeed, the official cult of Hatti during her final century was basically Hurrian in origin and form.⁴

Finally, the Hittites found a cultural model in the preeminent civilization of ancient western Asia, that of Mesopotamia. Adopting the cuneiform writing system from their Semitic neighbors to the south and adapting it for expressing their own language, the Hittites ultimately looked beyond Syria to the source of this script and the culture it represented – to Assyria and Babylonia. The study of cuneiform, everywhere restricted to a small scribal class, was carried out in Hatti as in the south primarily through the rote copying of models, beginning with basic lists of signs, proceeding through simple texts, and concluding with the classics of the Mesopotamian “canon.” Babylonian and Assyrian students concerned themselves with texts bequeathed to them by the Sumerians, who had invented the system of wedge-shaped writing, as well as with material in their own Semitic dialects. In turn, when Hittite scholars learned to write, they studied word-lists and compositions in both of the major Mesopotamian languages in addition to exemplary Hittite-language literature.⁵

It goes without saying that the borrowing of a script, especially one imparted by such methods, has a strong influence on the intellectual life of those by whom it is taken over. In the case of Hatti, the process of systematization and syncretism of cult throughout Anatolia was apparently abetted by the use of Mesopotamian ideograms to designate native deities in Hittite texts. Indeed, in many ways Babylonian concepts and practices were so predominant over elements derived from the Indo-European heritage of the Hittites that it seems more appropriate to think of Hatti as a peripheral Mesopotamian culture than as a representative of the Indo-European diaspora.

Of particular relevance to the theme of this conference is the use to which Hittite scribes put the Mesopotamian past with which they had become acquainted over the course of their education. At this point I must stress that our knowledge of cultural life in Hatti is skewed. All of the cuneiform tablets recovered from Hatti’s capital Hattuša (modern Boğazköy) and – in much smaller numbers – from provincial sites belong to governmental archives. That is, in some way or another their production contributed to the functioning of the king’s administration of the land on behalf of the deities who were its ultimate proprietors: Ritual texts assured the proper performance of worship, treaties guaranteed by divine oaths regulated the behavior of vassals, oracles allowed consultation with the gods, royal annals reported the pious stewardship of the

⁴ Hittite religion has recently been treated in great detail by Volkert Haas, *Geschichte der hethitischen Religion* (Leiden, 1994). Hurrian components of Hittite cult are discussed throughout this work, but see especially 632-639 for Hurro-Hittite syncretism as evidenced by the reliefs in the rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya.

⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Gary Beckman, “Mesopotamians and Mesopotamian Learning at Hattuša,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 35 (1983), 97-114.

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monarchs to their divine masters, and so on. Even texts from the scribal curriculum may be accommodated to this interpretation if we view them primarily as educational tools designed to prepare individuals for the performance of their bureaucratic duties. In the total absence of written materials from any other stratum of the population,⁶ our consideration of intellectual life in Hatti is thus restricted to the mental world of the ruling class and that of the small body of scribes which served it. We can say practically nothing about the ordinary Hittite's conception of history, or about what he or she might have known about the ancient cultures of the south.

Those whose concern with such matters is documented, the Hittite scribes, focused their interest in ancient Mesopotamia upon King Sargon of Akkad and his grandson Naram-Sin. No figures loomed larger in the historical memory of Assyrians and Babylonians than those of these two monarchs.⁷ Sargon, whose reign began in the middle of the twenty-third century, established the first "empire" in Asia, forging the Sumerian and Akkadian city-states of what is today southern Iraq into a single polity. His further conquests reached into western Iran and northern Syria. According to later texts, he even campaigned in the Konya plain of Anatolia, although modern scholars have yet to reach agreement about whether this tradition accurately reflects historical reality.⁸ Despite periodic revolts of subjugated cities and peoples, the empire won by Sargon endured for more than a century, and the personage of the king himself became paradigmatic for a pious and successful ruler.⁹

While the very identity of most of Sargon's successors was forgotten by later generations, his grandson Naram-Sin also assumed a major role in Mesopotamian historical thought. He successfully quelled several rebellions, including one of massive proportions, but was falsely remembered by posterity as the ruler under whom the Sargonic empire collapsed. Furthermore, tradition interpreted this supposed misfortune as punishment for alleged impiety of Naram-Sin toward the national god Enlil and for his skeptical attitude toward oracular

⁶ It is possible that wider groups of the population kept records on wax-covered wooden tablets, which have not survived. On this scribal medium, see Massimiliano Marazzi, "Ma gli Hittite scrivevano veramente su 'legno'?", in *Miscellanea di studi linguistici in onore di Walter Belardi*, vol. 1, ed. P. Cipriano et al. (Rome, 1994), 131-160.

⁷ The Sumerian and Akkadian texts of this tradition have been conveniently collected and edited by Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1997).

⁸ Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Relations between Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the Age of the Sargonic Kings," in *XXXIV. Uluslararası Assirioloji Kongresi. Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler*, ed. Hayat Erkanal et al. (Istanbul, 1997), 5-22. See also Marc Van De Mieroop, "Sargon of Agade and His Successors in Anatolia," forthcoming.

⁹ For the historical background, see Aage Westenholz, "The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture," in Walter Sallaberger and Aage Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (Freiburg, Schweiz, 1999), 15-117.

messages from other deities. Indeed, the figure of Naram-Sin lived on in Mesopotamian consciousness as the paradigmatic *Unheilsherrscher*. Each king of Assyria or Babylonia faced a clear choice: He could emulate the piety of the grandfather and enjoy a successful reign, or he could follow the grandson in scorning the gods and bringing ruin to his land.¹⁰

By the middle of the second millennium Sargonic traditions had already spread widely. Among the cuneiform tablets uncovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt, site of the short-lived residence city of pharaoh Akhenaten (Amenophis IV) of the early fourteenth century, was a copy of the epic *šar tamḫāri*, or "King of Battle," which celebrates the exploits of Sargon in Anatolia.¹¹ This composition is also represented by a roughly contemporary Hittite-language translation from Ḫattuša.¹² Various features of the orthography and grammar of the Egyptian find suggest that the tablet had indeed made its way to the pharaoh's scribal school from a Hittite source.¹³ Perhaps it was carried to the land of the Nile by a Hittite *Gastprofessor* dispatched by the Hittite king to instruct clerks of the Egyptian "Foreign Office" in the script and language employed in the international diplomatic discourse of the day.¹⁴ If this is the case, then the exemplar of the epic from Egypt is indirect evidence for Anatolian interest in the exploits of Sargon.

A recently published school text from the nineteenth-century Assyrian trading colony at Kaneš (modern Kültepe) in south-central Anatolia dealing with Sargon's suppression of a revolt reveals an early interest in the Sargonic kings on the part of northerners.¹⁵ Relevant material from the later Hittite scribal academies includes – in addition to the version of the "King of Battle" just mentioned – the invocation of several deified Sargonic kings (including a couple of obscure rulers) in a Hurrian-language religious text,¹⁶ an Akkadian-

¹⁰ See Hans G. Güterbock's seminal dissertation, "Die historische Tradition und ihre literarische Gestaltung bei Babyloniern und Hethitern bis 1200," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 42 (1934), 1-91, and 44 (1938), 45-149.

¹¹ J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln* (Berlin, 1915), no. 359 = *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* (Leipzig, 1907-), 12, 193, most recently edited by Shlomo Izre'el, *The Amarna Scholarly Tablets* (Groningen, 1997), 66-75.

¹² Emmanuel Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites [CTH]* (Paris, 1971), 310. The newest fragment to come to light, *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi [KBo]* (Berlin, 1916-), 22.6, was edited by Hans G. Güterbock, "Ein neues Bruchstück der Sargon-Erzählung 'König der Schlacht,'" *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 101 (1969), 14-26.

¹³ Izre'el 1997, 71-72.

¹⁴ On this question, cf. Beckman 1983, 112-114.

¹⁵ Cahit Günbattı, "Kültepe'den Akadlı Sargon'a Ait Bir Tablet," *Archivum Anatolicum* 3 (1997), 131-155.

¹⁶ *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi [KUB]* (Berlin, 1921-1990) 27.38 iii 18-19, iv 22-24, studied by Stefano de Martino, "KUB XXVII 38: Ein Beispiel kultureller und

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language prism presenting a semi-mythical account of a military challenge to Naram-Sin,¹⁷ and a Hittite-language version of the same story.¹⁸

The routes by which these traditions reached the Hittite capital were varied: the religious text was transmitted through Hurrian intermediaries in northern Mesopotamia or Syria, while the prism was the product of a Babylonian scribe who took up residence in Ḫattuša. The discovery of the Old Assyrian text at Kaneš even raises the possibility that the memory of the Akkadian kings was somehow preserved in Anatolia across the undocumented century separating the abandonment of the Assyrian merchant settlements from the rise of the Hittite state.

How should we account for the interest shown by the Hittite rulers and thinkers in Sargonic traditions? In the first instance, simple antiquarian curiosity about the earliest historical figures thought to have been active in Anatolia will certainly have played a role. Contemplation of the deeds of the Sargonic rulers tied local history to that of the wider world. Similarly, the Hittites translated and adapted the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh epic, giving particular emphasis to the hero's campaign to the Cedar Forest, which was thought to lie in an area of northern Syria now under their control.¹⁹

More importantly, however, the Sargon and Naram-Sin of tradition were well suited to serve as exemplars for Hittite as well as Mesopotamian monarchs. The kings of Akkad, like those of Ḫatti, had united numerous and culturally disparate small states into an empire, and both dynasties were confronted with the constant danger of rebellion. Hittite kings must have taken heart from the success of Sargon in establishing and defending his rule, and empathized with Naram-Sin in his struggles to maintain the hegemony of Akkad.

Finally, the Hittite rulers also subscribed to the philosophy of history exemplified by the contrasting paradigmatic figures of Sargon and Naram-Sin. Kings who – like Sargon – respected the gods and their worship were rewarded with prosperity for the land of Ḫatti and blessed with success in battle.²⁰ Indeed, prominent deities were thought to “run ahead” of Hittite armies in battle.²¹ Therefore, when Muršili II ascended the throne in a time of crisis and general

linguistischer Überlagerung in einem Text aus dem Archiv von Boğazköy,” *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 31 (1993), 121-134.

¹⁷ *KBo* 19.98 and 99, edited by Joan Goodnick Westenholz 1997, 280-293.

¹⁸ *CTH* 311. This material has not been treated comprehensively since Güterbock's study in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 44 (1938), 49-80.

¹⁹ See my “Gilgamesh in Ḫatti” in a forthcoming *Festschrift*.

²⁰ For the reciprocal character of this relationship, see the insightful discussion of Georg Schmid, “Religiöse Geschichtsdeutung und politische Propaganda im Großen Text des Ḫattušiliš III,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 37 (1985), 1-21.

²¹ Gary Beckman, “The Siege of Uršu Text (*CTH* 7) and Old Hittite Historiography,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 47 (1995), 31-32.

revolt in the late thirteenth century, he first turned his attention to neglected rites for the chief goddess of the pantheon and only thereafter began his campaign to subdue the rebels.²²

Conversely, Hittite monarchs who followed the example of the Naram-Sin of tradition and exhibited their contempt for the will of the gods through indifference to cultic obligations,²³ the breaking of oaths,²⁴ or the spilling of the blood of others in the royal family²⁵ only brought misfortune upon themselves and upon Ḫatti. Consider the following excerpt from the historical prologue to the Proclamation of King Telipinu, in which he describes a period of Hittite decline in the late seventeenth century:

“And when (King) Ḫantili [grew] old and began to become a god (i.e., to die), then Zidanta murdered Pišeni, son of Ḫantili, together with his children. He [also] murdered his most prominent servants.

Zidanta became king, but the gods sought revenge for the blood of Pišeni. The gods made his begotten son Ammuna his enemy. And he killed his father Zidanta.

²² *KBo* 3.4 i 16-29, edited by Jean-Pierre Grégois, “Les annales decennales de Mursili II (CTH 61, I),” *Hehitica* 9 (1988), 55-56, 75-76.

²³ *KUB* 14.8 obv. 8'-12' (Second Plague Prayer of Muršili II): “[... I sought (the cause of) the anger] of the gods, [and I found] two old tablets. One tablet [dealt with the ritual of the Euphrates River ...] Earlier kings [performed] the ritual of the Euphrates [...], but since the time of my father [people have been dying] in Ḫatti, [and] we have never performed [the ritual] of the Euphrates.” For a complete translation of this text, see my rendering in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, ed. W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden, 1997), 157-159.

²⁴ *KUB* 14.8 obv. 13'-19' (Second Plague Prayer of Muršili II): “The second tablet dealt with (the town of) Kuruštama – how the Storm-god of Ḫatti took the men of Kuruštama to Egyptian territory, and how the Storm-god of Ḫatti made a treaty concerning them with the Hittites. Furthermore, they were put under oath by the Storm-god of Ḫatti. And although the Hittites and the Egyptians had been put under oath by the Storm-god of Ḫatti, the Hittites came to repudiate (the agreement), and suddenly the Hittites transgressed the oath. My father sent infantry and chariotry, and they attacked the border region of Egyptian territory in the land of Amka.” For a complete translation, see Hallo and Younger 1997, 1:157-159.

²⁵ *KUB* 14.14++ i 8-21 (First Plague Prayer of Muršili II): “O gods, [my] lords, a plague broke out in Ḫatti, and Ḫatti has been beaten down by the plague. It [has been] very much [oppressed]. This is the twentieth year. Because Ḫatti is (still) experiencing many deaths, the affair of Tudḫaliya the Younger, son of Tudḫaliya, began to haunt [me]. I inquired of a god through an oracle, [and] the affair of Tudḫaliya the Younger was ascertained by the god (as a source of our suffering). Because Tudḫaliya the Younger was lord of Ḫatti, the princes, the noblemen, the commanders of the thousands, the officers, [the subalterns (?)], and all [the infantry] and chariotry of [Ḫattuša] swore an oath to him. My father also swore an oath to him. [But when my father] mistreated Tudḫaliya, all [the princes, the noblemen], the commanders of the thousands, and the officers of Ḫattuša [went over] to my [father]. Although they had sworn an oath (to him), [they seized] Tudḫaliya, and they killed [Tudḫaliya]. Furthermore, they killed those of his brothers [who stood by] him.” For a complete translation, see Hallo and Younger 1997, 1:156-157.

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Ammuna became king, but the gods sought revenge for the blood of his father Zidanta. [They did] not [allow] him or the grain, vines, cattle, and sheep in his domain [to thrive]. ... The land became hostile to him ... Wherever the armies went on campaign, they did not return successfully."²⁶

Thus the malign consequences of impiety could extend across the generations and threaten the very existence of the state, as Naram-Sin's insult to Enlil was thought to have brought about the collapse of Akkad.

The self-identification of a Hittite sovereign with his Akkadian forerunner is made explicit in a passage from the Annals of King Hattušili I, where his crossing of the Euphrates river while on campaign in southern Anatolia is compared to a similar deed of Sargon:

"No one had crossed the Euphrates, but I, the Great King Tabarna (a title of the Hittite monarch) crossed it on foot, while my army crossed it after me on foot. Sargon had also crossed it. He defeated the army of the city of Hahha, but he did nothing to Hahha and did not burn it down. ... But I, the Great King Tabarna, destroyed Hahha and burned it down. I displayed its smoke to the Sun-god in Heaven and to the Storm-god."²⁷

Thus the deeds of the Hittite king and general exceeded those ascribed to the Akkadian predecessor whom he here appropriates. This was only appropriate, since it was a topos in royal inscriptions of the ancient Near East that each king outdo his ancestors and predecessors. I conclude with an excerpt from a text of a later Hattušili, conventionally the third to bear this throne name (early twelfth century), which, incidentally, also illustrates several of the themes I have considered here:

"I became Great King. (The goddess) Šawuša, my lady, took me and installed me in rule. Those already king who were on good terms with me continued on these good terms with me. They began to send messengers to me regularly, and they also commenced sending me diplomatic gifts on a regular basis. They had not sent such gifts to any of my fathers or forefathers. A king who owed me reverence revered me. I conquered those (lands) which were hostile to me and added province upon province to the lands of Hatti. Whichever (kings) had been hostile to my fathers and forefathers made peace with me."²⁸

Sargon would have approved.

²⁶ KUB 3.1++ i 63-ii 1, ii 3-4 and duplicates, edited by Inge Hoffmann, *Der Erlaß Telipinus* (Heidelberg, 1984), 24-26.

²⁷ KBo 10.2 iii 29-40 and duplicates (Hittite) = KBo 10.1 rev. 18-24 (Akkadian), edited by Fiorella Imparati and Claudio Saporetti, *Studi Classici e Orientali* 14 (1965), 52-53, 79-80, 83. On this particular passage, see Hans G. Güterbock, "Sargon of Akkad Mentioned by Hattušili I of Hatti," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 18 (1964), 1-6.

²⁸ KUB 1.1++ iv 48-59 and duplicates, edited by Heinrich Otten, *Die Apologie Hattusilis III.* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 26-27.