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Hittite Rituals: An Overview

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Central Anatolia was the seat of the Hittite kingdom, a powerful political entity that prospered between the XVIIth and the end of XIIth centuries BC. The thirty thousand fragments of cuneiform tablets uncovered in Hattuša/Boğazkale, the capital city, document many aspects of the main ritual traditions of Hittite Anatolia. The following ritual traditions will be briefly examined: I. The Hatto-Hittite ritual traditions with an important Hattian cultural background (central Anatolia); II. The Luwian ritual traditions (central-southern and western Anatolia); III. The Kizzuwatnian ritual traditions (southern Anatolia).

I. The Hatto-Hittite Ritual Traditions

I.1. *CTH* 416: Rituals for the purification of the royal couple.¹

We know that these rituals deal with anti-witchcraft, since it is mentioned that the king and queen have to be purified from evil words they uttered themselves. The beginning of the composition is very fragmentary. Once it becomes fully comprehensible, we realize that the text describes ritual manipulations of tongue figurines made of iron. Here is the relevant passage in translation:

“[F]urthermore, the palace functionary brings two big iro[n] tongues – one for the ki[ng, one for the queen] and the king and queen [*put*] (them) into their mouths.”²

The use of tongue figurines is not exclusive to the Hattian area. It can also be observed in Kizzuwatnian rituals, for instance. Here, the tongue figurines are put in physical contact with the patients’ tongues, which is probably a way to make them absorb the miasma emanating from them.

Afterward, the king and queen have to spit three times onto clay figurines and then the ritual expert says:

¹ MONTUORI, *Quattro rituali* and MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 47–87.

² KBo 17.2 i 16"-20" (MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 54–55, § 3): [*a*]nda=ma namma 2 GAL lāleš AN.BA[R-aš] anda DUMU É.GAL pētai 1-EN ANA LU[GAL 1-EN ANA MUNUS.LUGAL] ta LUGAL-uš MUNUS.LUGAL-š=a iššā=šma [dāi?].

“I speak thus to the king and queen: ‘I have just taken (away) from you the tongues of the land. I have taken (away) from you the illness. I have taken it (away from your) hearts, I have taken it (away from) your heads.’”³

It should be realized that the heart is usually used for designating the whole inner part of the body, whereas the head can also be used for designating the person. Ritual spitting is attested everywhere in Hittite Anatolia, but the modalities might vary. For instance, spitting directly into the mouth of an animal substitute is only documented in the Kizzuwatnian and the Lower Land rituals.⁴

II. Luwian Ritual Traditions

Several Luwian speaking areas have been included in the Land of Hatti since the XVIIth century BC. This is especially the case of the Lower Land that lies immediately South of the Hattian heartland, but Western Anatolia should also be considered.

II.1. Ritual Traditions of the Lower Land

The texts reflecting the ritual traditions of the Lower Land are not conclusively identified as yet. The festival texts relating to the cult of Huwaššanna, the main goddess of the Lower Land, are more easily recognized, but they are not yet fully edited. A PhD dissertation on this particular topic is currently underway. As for the ritual texts *per se*, Hittitologists generally consider that the rituals performed by the expert called Tunnawiya could originate from the Lower Land.⁵ Indeed, her name is traditionally associated with the toponym Tunna/Dunna, a city from the Lower Land lying on the current archaeological site of Zeyve Höyük – Porsuk.

The *incipit* of the text of the ritual of the watercourse of Tunnawiya is as follows:⁶

“Thus (speaks) Tunnawi(ya), the Old Woman: if a person – may it be a man or a woman – (is) standing in some impurity, or (if) someone else has called him/her into impurity, or (if) the children of a woman die one after the other, or (if) her fetuses fall one after the other, may it

³ KBo 17.1 i 9'-13' (MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 56–57, § 7'-8'): *ta LUGAL-i MUNUS.LUGAL=ya [(ki)]ššan mēmahhi [(k)]āšata=šmaš=kan* (variante de *kāša*, cf. Hoffner's grammar) *utniyandan lāluš* (mot à mot : the land (acc.), the tongues (acc.) double accusative or old hittite gen. pl. in *-an*) *dāhhu[n (irm)]a(n)=šmaš=kan dāhhun kardišmi=ya=at=kan dāhhu[n (harša)]ni=šmi=ya=at=kan dāhhun*.

⁴ MOUTON, *Les rituels de la Vieille Femme Tunnawiya*, 83.

⁵ MOUTON, *Les rituels de la Vieille Femme Tunnawiya*.

⁶ GOETZE, *Tunnawi*.

be for a man or a woman, his/her organs (are) separated because of the matter of impurity, § that person experiences impurity (lit. he sees impurity for himself). That person – may it be a man or a woman – will perform the sacrificial ritual of impurity. One calls it the ritual of the watercourse. This (is) only one ritual.”⁷

The Old Woman is a well-known designation for a ritual expert in Hittite Anatolia. She is also knowledgeable in some forms of divination, namely the KIN oracle – a technique involving objects being observed over three days in a row – and the MUŠ oracle, a technique I will mention below.

This extract reflects the general tendency of Hittite rituals, many of them having a very general function. The *incipit* mentions the possibility of the patient being sick (“his/her organs (are) separated,” i.e. his/her reproductive organs do no longer function), or in other words, heavily defiled, because he “stood in some impurity,” which might mean that he provoked his own impurity through contact with an impure source or through a fault he perpetrated. The text also mentions the possibility that someone else provoked that impurity (“someone else has called him/her into impurity”), through witchcraft, for instance. After that, the text enumerates some possible symptoms of the patient’s impurity: infant death, miscarriages, infertility, all of them being consequences of defilement. The ritual can also be adapted to the gender of the patient. The continuation of the same text lists the possible sources of defilement that the ritual can treat: “evil impurity” (a designation that summarizes any severe anomaly), bewitchment, *āštayaratar* (something bad, although we do not know what exactly), “the anger of the gods,” and the “terror of the dead.”

The text states that the patient is all dressed in black. Parallel to that, a black animal substitute is prepared, as well as offerings. The ritual expert performs sacrifices to the deities during the night and simultaneously a reed hut is built in an uncultivated place. This is where the patient most probably spends the night and this phase can thus be interpreted as ritual seclusion. Ritual seclusions are usually performed in order to separate a person from the rest of his community in various contexts, among which rites of passage (pregnancy for instance). When the patient comes out of the hut, the Old Woman removes all his black clothes from him,

⁷ KUB 7.53+ i 1-10 (GOETZE, Tunnawi, 4-5): *UMMA* ^t*Tunnaui* MUNUSŠU.GI mān=kan antuh<šaš> naššu LÚ-LIM našma MUNUS-za papranni kuedanikki anda tianza našma=za=an=kan tamaiš kuiški papranni šer halzian harzi našma=kan MUNUS-ni DUMU^{MEŠ}=ŠU akkiškanzi našma=(š)ši=kan UZU^Ušarhūwanda=ma mauškezzi našma LÚ-ni našma MUNUS-ni paprannaš uddananza UZU^UUR^{HA}-š=a arha šarran § nu=za=kan apāš antuhšaš papratar uškezzi nu=za apāš antuhšaš naššu LÚ-aš našma MUNUS-za papranaš SISKUR kiššan šipanti ŠA I₇=at=za SISKUR halziššanzi nu kī SISKUR 1-EN=pat.

comparing them with the patient's impurity to be got rid of. The patient goes to bathe and the black clothes are then thrown into the watercourse with all the other ritual remnants.

II.2. Rituals from Arzawa and Greater Arzawa (Western Anatolia)

These ritual texts are part of a small corpus that is easily defined, contrary to the corpora we have examined so far. This is thanks to the *incipit* of these texts which include the name of the ritual expert and, more importantly, his or her origin. Daliah Bawanypeck edited the whole corpus in 2005.⁸ This ensemble comprises rituals designed to neutralize an evil bird omen. In these rituals, an augur collaborates with the Old Woman. This is a specificity of the Arzawa ritual traditions that could be explained by the importance of bird divination in Western Anatolia.⁹

II.2.1. The ritual of Ašhella against an epidemic¹⁰

The *incipit* of this text states:

“Thus (speaks) Ašhella, the man of the Land of Hapalla (i.e. in Greater Arzawa): if the year (is) bad and (if) there is an epidemic in the army, I perform this ritual. § I do thus: when in the day, the evening starts, all the lords of the army – whoever they are –, each of them prepares a ram. The rams, whether (they are) white (or) whether (they are) black, it does not matter.”¹¹

We see that each ram functions as a living substitute for each warlord. The neck and horns of the rams are adorned with plaits of colored wool. Parallel to this, the king, who is present at the ritual process, receives a different kind of living substitute, namely a female prisoner. While each warlord touches his ram, they pronounce the following incantation:

“Whichever god has caused this epidemic, now rams are standing (here for him). They (are) very fat with (their) liver, (with their) heart and with (their) limb(s). May the flesh of human beings become repulsive to him again! Be soothed with those rams!”¹²

⁸ BAWANYPECK, Die Rituale der Auguren.

⁹ MOUTON / RUTHERFORD, Luwian Religion.

¹⁰ MOUTON, Rituels, mythes et prières hittites, 169–189.

¹¹ KUB 9.32 Obv. 1-7 (MOUTON, Rituels, mythes et prières hittites, 172–175, § 1-2): [(U)]MMA ¹Ašhella LÚ KUR ^{URU}Hapalla mān MU.KAM-za harranza KARAS=ya=kan an[da (ÚŠ-kan kišari)] nu kī SISKUR DÜ-mi § DÜ-mi=ma kiššan GIM-an U₄.KAM-za nekuz mehū[(ni kišari)] nu kuēš kuēš EN^{MEŠ} KARAS hūmanteš nu=z[(a hūmanza)] UDU.ŠIR handaizzi UDU.ŠIR=ma mān hargaēš mān dankuwaēš UL kuitki duqqāri.

¹² KUB 9.32+ Obv. 19-23 (Mouton 2016, 176-179, § 4): kuiš=wa DINGIR-LIM kī ÚŠ-an iyat kinun=a=wa kāša UDU.ŠIR-aš^{HÁ} arantari nu=war=at IŠTU ^{UZU}NÍG.GIG ^{UZU}ŠÀ U IŠTU ^{UZU}ÚR mekki warganteš

Here, we see that the epidemic is viewed as a divine hunger for human flesh. After physical contact has been established between the substitutes and the patients, both the rams and the woman are abandoned at the frontier of an enemy land without being killed. This scapegoat technique is also attested, although in a different way, in Kizzuwatna.¹³

II.2.2. The ritual of Paškuwatti¹⁴

The aim of this ritual is to cure a man of sexual impotence. Several ritual techniques are used. One of them is the building of a reed gate. This gate constitutes a “magical” space that the patient has to cross in order to be “transformed” back into a man. Here is the relevant passage: “I put a spindle and a distaff in the [hand of] the ritual patron. He crosses the gate. When he steps out of the gate, I take the spindle and the distaff away from him and I [g]ive him a bow (and) [arrows]. At the same time, I say: ‘I have just removed your femininity and I have given (your) virility back to you. [You have] rejected again [woman’s] behavior and [you have taken] (back) man’s be[ha]vior.’”¹⁵

The spindle and the distaff are well-known symbols of femininity, whereas the bow and arrows are obvious symbols of virility. But the main agent in this sequence is the gate which visually marks the symbolic transformation of the patient.

The second ritual technique used for curing sexual impotence is an incubation ritual, which means that the man has to sleep in a ritual manner. Here is the passage:

“The ritual patron sleeps. (Then, he will say) whether he experiences the goddess’s incarnation in a dream, (whether) she goes to him and sleeps with him. While I in[voke] the goddess for three days, he reports (every day) the dreams that he experiences, (he tells) whether the goddess shows him (her) eyes (or) whether the goddess sleeps with him.”¹⁶

nu=wa=(š)ši=kan ŠA AMILUTTI UZU puggaru namma nu=wa=(š)šan katta kēdaš UDU.ŠIR-aš^{HÁ} waršiyahhut.

¹³ MOUTON, *Rituels de ‘boucs émissaires’*.

¹⁴ MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 230–251.

¹⁵ KUB 7.8+ i 20-29 (MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 234–235, § 4): [*nu AN*]A EN.SÍSKUR GIŠ^{HÁ}hūišan GIŠ^{HÁ}hūlali=y[a ŠU-i] anda tehhi n=aš=kan KÁ.GAL^{HÁ}-TIM kattan [arha] uizzi n=aš=kan GIM-an KÁ.GAL^{HÁ}-TIM [par]ā tiyazi nu=(š)ši=(š)šan GIŠ^{HÁ}hūēša[n GIŠ^{HÁ}]hūlali=ya arha dahhi nu=(š)ši GIŠ^{HÁ}PAN [GI^{HÁ}p]ihhi n=ašta anda kiššan memahhi kāša=wa=ta=(k)kan MUNUS-tar arha dahhun nu=wa=(t)ta EGIR-pa LÚ-tar pihhun nu=wa=[za MUNUS-aš] šaklin arha namma pešši[yat] nu=wa=za šarā LÚ-aš ša[k]lin [datta].

¹⁶ KUB 7.8+ iv 1-10 (MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 248–249, § 18): *nu=za BĒL SÍSKUR šešzi nu=za=kan mān DINGIR-LUM zašhiya tuēkki=(š)ši aušzi katti=(š)š[i] paizzi n=aš=ši katti=ši šešzi*

In the context of my research on dreaming in Hittite Anatolia,¹⁷ I suggested that the two configurations mentioned in the text, namely whether the goddess shows only her eyes or whether she agrees to sleep with him, these two configurations could correspond to two different levels of purity. If the goddess only shows her eyes, the patient is considered to be healed, but if she agrees to sleep with him, it probably means that he accessed a higher level of purity. This passage has been compared with votive inscriptions found at the temple of Epidauros, in Ancient Greece: several reports of people having a sexual intercourse with a deity in their dreams can be found in these inscriptions.

III. The ritual traditions of Kizzuwatna

This is the largest corpus of texts comprising anti-witchcraft rituals, and others curing epidemics or helping a pregnant woman. There are also a large number of purification rituals. The main element that differentiates the Kizzuwatnian rituals from the other rituals is the presence of Hurrian components.

III.1. The ritual of Pāpanikri¹⁸

Here is the *incipit* of this composition:

“Thus (speaks) Pāpanikri, the *patili*- of the land of Kummanni: if a woman is (to go to) the birthstool and (if) the big basin of the birthstool cracks, or (if) a peg breaks, if the woman has not yet birthed and she is still there, one opens the windows again. It (i.e. the birthstool) (is) no longer consecrated.”¹⁹

This ritual is to be performed before the woman gives birth to her child. The *incipit* explains the reason why this ritual should be performed: if the birthstool, as it is usually called, is damaged, it is viewed as a bad omen for the woman. It means that the gods are angry with her and the text states that the birthstool is no longer consecrated, which means that it is no longer appropriate for the ritual. The so-called birthstool is in reality the assemblage of a large basin-

kuitman=*ma* DINGIR-LUM INA U₄.3.KAM *mug*[*āmi*] *nu*=*za*=*kan* *zašimuš* *kuiēš* *uškezz*[*i*] *n*=*aš* *memiškezz* *mān*=*ši* DINGIR-LUM IGI^{HÁ}-*wa* *parā* *tekkušnuškezz*[*i*] *nu*=(*š*)*ši* *mān* DINGIR-LUM *katti*=(*š*)*ši* *šešzi*.

¹⁷ MOUTON, *Rêves hittites*, 65.

¹⁸ MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 253–281.

¹⁹ KBo 5.1 i 1-6 (MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 256–257, § 1): UMMA ¹*Pāpanikri* ^{LÚ}*patili* ŠA KUR URU *Kummanni* *mān* MUNUS-*za* *harnāui* *ēšzi* *nu* ^{DUG}DÍLIM.GAL *harnāuwaš* *huniktari* *našma* ^{GIŠ}GAG *duwarnattari* *nu*=*za* *mān* MUNUS-TUM *nāui* *hāši* *n*=*aš*=*kan* *apiya*=*pat* *anda* *ēšzi* *nu* ^{GIŠ}AB^{HÁ} EGIR-*pa* *haššanzi* *nu* *namma* UL *šuppi*.

like vessel, flanked on each side by two wooden pegs. We generally imagine that the pregnant woman would crouch over the basin with each of her hands gripping a peg at the moment of delivery.

The ritual procedure comprises the use of a living animal substitute for the child to be born, more precisely a lamb that is dressed in the small red clothes of the future child. This can be explained by the circumstances of the performance of this ritual, namely in case of an anomaly. Ritual substitution is viewed as one of the most efficient ways of ridding a person of impurity. As the mother is clearly in trouble with her gods, her child is also automatically in a similar situation.

The ritual procedure also consists of replacing the defiled birthstool with another one. One way among others of consecrating the new birthstool is through the smearing of blood from a bird. This consecrating power of animal blood is exclusive to Kizzuwatna; it is not found anywhere else in Hittite Anatolia.²⁰ Note that, contrary to what was written, the blood smearing rite has nothing to do with the so-called blood sacrifice, the Hurrian *zurki*. These are two different rites, but they have a common logic, since they both imply the possible sacred character of blood.²¹

Another important element of the ritual procedure is the pregnant woman's dreams, as her dreams are supposed to be a *medium* through which the angry god can reveal his identity and the reason of his anger.

III.2. The ritual of Maštigga against family quarrels²²

The *incipit* of this text is as follows:

“Thus (speaks) Maštigga, woman of the city of Kizzuwatna: if a father and a son, a husband and his wife or a brother and a sister quarrel, I treat them in the following way.”²³

The circumstances of the ritual could be puzzling: how could a ritual solve family quarrels? The text shows that the origin of these quarrels is thought to be evil speech and evil gestures, in other words witchcraft, perpetrated by members of the family. Evil speech is represented by tongue figurines whereas evil gestures are symbolized by hand figurines.

²⁰ MOUTON, Les rituels de naissance kizzuwatniens, 42 note 40.

²¹ MOUTON, Review of Y. Feder.

²² MILLER, Studies in the Origins and MOUTON, Rituels, mythes et prières hittites, 374–419.

²³ KBo 39.8 i 1-4 (MOUTON, Rituels, mythes et prières hittites, 376–377, § 1): [U(MMA ^fMaštigga MUNUS URU Kizzuwatn)]a mān=ašta [(ABU DUMU-RU=ya našma ^{LÚ}MUDU DAM=SU=ya)] našma ŠEŠ N[(I)]N=ya [(halluwanzi n=aš kiššan)] aniyami [(nu) kī da]hhi.

The ritual procedure comprises the manipulation of a fish:

“The Old Woman takes a fish, she waves it over the two ritual patrons [to]gether, and she speaks thus: ‘This fish (is) the bull of the sea. Just [l]ike this fish was separated from the sea, let now the tongues (and) [curses] be separated from those days!’ She throws the fish into the [he]arth.”²⁴

The ritual use of fish either as a ritual substitute or as a sacrificial victim or sometimes as both at the same time is a Kizzuwatnian and, more generally, a Hurrian feature in the context of purification rituals.²⁵ From the same area probably comes the MUŠ oracular technique consisting, in my opinion, of observing eels in a water basin.²⁶ Thus, it seems that fish enjoyed a sacred character in the Hurrian and Kizzuwatnian areas.

Conclusion

The appropriation process of all these provincial ritual traditions by the *elite* of the Hittite capital city Hattuša is one of the consequences of the successive territorial conquests of the Hittite Great Kings. In order to settle on a long-term basis in a new territory, welcoming the local pantheons as well as the local ritual traditions into the state religious system is a clever way to acquire allies among the local *elite*. How all these ritual traditions were transmitted to Hattuša is another matter. Several ways must have been used, which may have been oral or written. In the case of Kizzuwatna, Jared Miller²⁷ has shown that some compositions could originate from a local scribal school in Kizzuwatna itself.

The most delicate question remains why. Why would the *elite* of Hattuša care about the rituals from Kizzuwatna or Arzawa? Why would they bother to copy them again and again and what was the use of such rituals in Hattuša? It is not possible to obtain firm answers to these questions, but the possibility that all this ritual knowledge was valued by the *elite* for its content should be considered. One or two allusions can be found in festival texts and oracular reports that a particular ritual or an offering should be performed “in the manner of the city of

²⁴ KBo 39.8 i 38-43 (MOUTON, *Rituels, mythes et prières hittites*, 382-383, § 11): *nu* MUNUSŠU.GI KU₆ *dāi* *n=an=kan ANA 2 BĒL SISKUR* [ta]kšan šer arha wahnuzi nu kiššan memai kās=wa KU₆-uš arunaš GU₄.MAH-aš *nu=wa=kan kās* KU₆ [m]āhhan arunaz tuhhuštat kinun=a tuhšandu [ap]edaš U₄-aš EME[^{HA} hūrtāuš] *nu=kan* KU₆-un [haš]šī peššiyazzi.

²⁵ MOUTON, *Food for the Divine*.

²⁶ LEFÈVRE-NOVARO / MOUTON, *Aux origines de l'ichthyomancie*.

²⁷ MILLER, *Studies in the Origins*.

CN.”²⁸ This shows that some provincial rites were being performed whenever deemed necessary. So it is possible to believe that such rites actually enjoyed a certain form of prestige in the royal Court of Hattuša. As the Hittite Great King welcomes into his state pantheon all the “provincial” divine entities, his ritual experts have to know how to please and properly worship those entities, as well as how to solve any problems relating to them. The composition called the Aphasia of Muršili II²⁹ shows that the Great King believed that he had offended a Kizzuwatnian Stormgod and that this situation required a Kizzuwatnian ritual comprising what the texts call an *ambašše*, a burnt-sacrifice of an ox and birds. This shows that the “provincial” rituals were being used from time to time by the Great King himself. Therefore, we can safely deduce that the ritual texts were not being kept in Hattuša’s libraries for intellectual purposes only. Their content was sometimes used whenever deemed necessary.

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²⁸ MOUTON, *Les rituels de naissance kizzuwatniens*, 20.

²⁹ GÖRKE, *Muršilis Sprachlähmung*.

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