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*Organization, Representation,
and Symbols of Power
in the Ancient Near East*

Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
at Würzburg
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GERNOT WILHELM

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The Horns of a Dilemma, or On the Divine Nature of the Hittite King

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I begin with a well-known paradox regarding the ideology of Hittite kingship.¹ When a monarch died, his survivors said that he “had become a god” (*šuniš kiš-*).² This turn of phrase clearly indicates that up until that moment, he had occupied a status other than that of a deity.³ Yet a number of iconographic representations of Hittite rulers from the Empire period show them wearing the horns that across the cultures of the ancient Near East mark those who bear them as divine.⁴

For instance, on the rock relief at Fraktin in Cappadocia (Fig. 1),⁵ in which Ḫattušili III and his wife Puduḫepa are depicted worshiping the Storm-god and the Sun-goddess, respectively, the king’s helmet carries the same frontal horn (or horns) as does that of the god. Further relevant examples include the joint seal of Queen Puduḫepa and her son Tudḫaliya IV impressed on a tablet recovered at Ugarit (Fig. 2), the relief of Tudḫaliya alone from Haus A in the Oberstadt at Ḫattuša (Boğazköy 19; Fig. 3), and the stele depicting Šuppiluliuma II excavated at the Südburg (Kammer 2) in the capital (Fig. 4).

While some scholars have suggested that such images must have been created posthumously on the order of later rulers,⁶ this explanation seems particularly unlikely in the case of the seal just mentioned, which was applied to an edict in which Tudḫaliya set out the terms for the divorce of a vassal king.⁷ Surely this document was inscribed at the time the judgment was issued. As for the stele of Šuppiluliuma,

1. In general on the role of the Hittite king in religion, see H. A. Hoffner, “The Royal Cult in Ḫatti,” in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. G. Beckman & T. J. Lewis; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006) 132–51.

2. As in the opening lines of the ritual for the funeral of a king or queen (CTH 450): *mān* ^{URU}Ḫattuši *šalliš waštāiš kišari naššu-za LUGAL-uš našma MUNUS.LUGAL-aš DINGIR^{LM}-iš kišari*, “If a great calamity occurs in Ḫattuša, whereby either the king or the queen becomes a god . . .” A. Kassian, A. Korolév, & A. Sidel’tsev, *Hittite Funerary Ritual šalliš waštāiš* (AOAT 288; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2002) 46–47.

3. As observed already by Ph. H. J. Houwink ten Cate, “The Sun God of Heaven, the Assembly of the Gods and the Hittite King,” in *Effigies Dei* (ed. Dirk van der Plas; Leiden: Brill) 24.

4. See R. M. Boehmer, “Hörnerkrone,” *RLA* 4 (1975) 431–34, and cf. J. Börker-Klähn, “Götterkämpfe? Historie!,” in *Anatolia Antica: Studi in memoria di Fiorella Imparati* (ed. S. de Martino & F. Pecchioli Daddi; Eothen 11; Firenze: LoGisma 2002), 112–17.

5. For an excellent photo, see K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter* (München: Beck, 1976), fig. 198.

6. E.g., R. Mayer-Opificius, “Hethitische Kunstdenkmäler des 13. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.,” in *Anatolia and the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honor of Tahsin Özgüç* (ed. K. Emre et al.; Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989) 361.

7. RS 17.159 (CTH 107); translated in G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, second edition (WAW 7; Atlanta, 1999) 180–81, no. 36A.

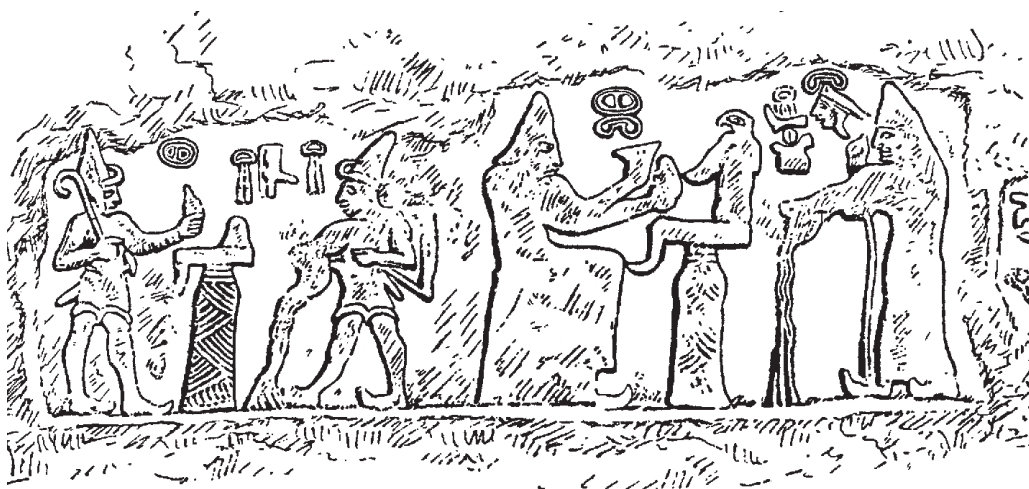


Fig. 1. The relief at Fraktin; after H. Otten, *Puduḫepa: Eine hethitische Königin in ihren Textzeugnissen* (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1975) 21.

we know of no successor who might have been responsible for its carving,⁸ so it must have been commissioned by the depicted monarch himself.

In examining this apparent paradox, let us now take a closer look at the corpus of depictions of the Hittite king, which fall into two sets. Building upon the work of Theo van den Hout,⁹ we may conveniently designate these groups according to the headgear worn by the monarch in each. We have already met the warrior type in which the ruler is helmeted, or *kurutauwant-*,¹⁰ wears a kilt, and carries a weapon—usually a bow or spear. This depiction has been borrowed from that of the Storm-god, as may be seen from a comparison with one of many relevant seal impressions from Emar (Fig. 4).¹¹ The identity of the deity is indicated here by the hieroglyphic label TONITRUS. The one notable difference between god and king in this category is that the weapon brandished by the former is most often a mace, in keeping with the traditional Syro-Anatolian iconography of this figure.¹²

In the second type of image, the ruler appears in priestly garb. We may call this the *luppannauwant-* mode, or that of “wearing a close-fitting cap.”¹³ The depiction

8. This fact leads D. Bonatz, “The Divine Image of the King: Religious Representation of Political Power in the Hittite Empire,” in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Heinz & M. H. Feldman; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 120–1, to posit that the image represents Šuppiluliuma I, but in light of the preceding example of a horned living king, it seems more natural to identify the image as the author of the adjacent hieroglyphic text, who is without question Šuppiluliuma II.

9. “Tuḫalija IV. und die Ikonographie hethitischer Großkönige des 13. Jhs.,” *BiOr* 52 (1995) 545–73.

10. van den Hout, *BiOr* 52 (1995) 568–9. J. Puhvel, *HED* 4, 286–7, has less exactly “helmeted(?)”.

11. Seal of Šurši-Dagan, son of Bilillu; D. Beyer, *Emar IV: Les sceaux*. (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 2001), 64–65, sceau A28.

12. The “smiting god,” exemplified by the well known stele of “Ba’al with Lightning” from Ugarit; *Le royaume d’Ougarit: Aux origines de l’alphabet* (ed. G. Galliano & Y. Calvet; Paris: Somogy editions d’art, 2004) 170, fig. 154.

13. *CHD* 3, 85.





Fig. 2. Seal of Tudḫaliya IV and Puduḫepa from Ugarit; after *Ugaritica III*, ed. Claude F.-A. Schaeffer (Paris: Geuthner, 1956), fig. 24.



Fig. 3. Stele of Tudḫaliya IV from the Boğazköy Oberstadt; after P. Neve, *Anatolica* 14 (1987) 87.

of Muwattalli II at Sirkeli,¹⁴ the earliest certain attested image of a Hittite king, is a member of this group. As pointed out long ago by Albrecht Goetze,¹⁵ the sacerdotal outfit includes ear-rings, a long robe, and most often a curved crook, or lituus (Hittite *kalmuš*). These regalia are identical to those of the Sun-god, as a confrontation of the depictions of king Tudḫaliya IV and of the Sun-god at Yazılıkaya¹⁶ makes clear. In one of his last essays,¹⁷ H. G. Güterbock showed that the sole iconographic distinction between solar deity and Hittite monarch is that the Sun-god is always depicted beneath the winged solar disk, an attribute that never accompanies the king.

Additional examples of the *luppannauwant*-mode are the *Umarmungsszene* or embracing tableau of Tudḫaliya and his patron deity Šarruma at Yazılıkaya¹⁸ and two scenes of worship within the bas-relief series from Alaca Höyük.¹⁹ These last two scenes serve to confirm that the *Sitz im Leben* of the outfit of the “close-fitting cap” was cultic.

All unambiguous representations of the king of Ḫatti may be assigned to one or the other of these types,²⁰ both of which—as we have seen—are dependent on the

14. K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter*, fig. 195.

15. “The Priestly Dress of the Hittite King,” *JCS* 1 (1947) 176–85.

16. K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter*, figs. 234, 250.

17. “Sungod or King?” in *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and its Neighbors. Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç* (ed. M. Mellink et al.; Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1993) 225–6.

18. K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter*, fig. 253.

19. K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter*, figs. 214, 221.

20. Of course the depiction of Ḫattušili III at Tanis, in which he unexpectedly wears both a helmet and a long robe, is the product of the imagination of an Egyptian artist and does not invalidate this observation. See K. Bittel, “Bildliche Darstellungen Ḫattušili’s III. in Ägypten,” in *Kaniššuwār: A Tribute*



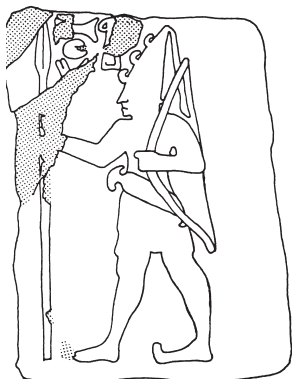


Fig. 4. Stele of Šuppiluliuma II from Boğazköy; after Th. van den Hout, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 52 (1995) 550, Abb. 3.

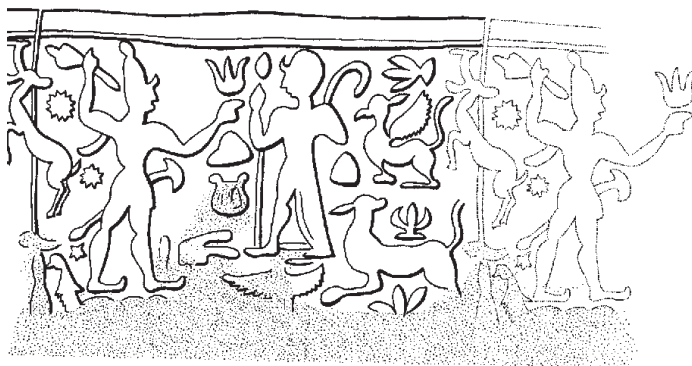


Fig. 5. Impression of seal of Šurši-Dagan, son of Bilillu from Emar; after D. Beyer, *Emar IV: Les sceaux*. (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 2001), 65.

iconography of a great god. This should not be surprising in light of an incantation drawn from an Old Hittite ritual:

O Sun-god of the Gods, as (the drink) *marnuwan* and beer are blended and their essence and contents become one, may the soul and the interior of the Sun-god of the Gods and of the Labarna (Hittite emperor) hereby become one! O [Storm-god of the Gods], as (the drink) *walhi* and fine beer are blended and their essence and contents become [one], may the soul and interior of the Storm-god of Heaven and the Labarna [become] one!²¹

That is, the spirit and substance of the king should fuse with those of the two most important male divinities of the Hittite pantheon, precisely those whom he resembles in his personal attire. Ideally then, the Hittite monarch and the major gods of the state were consubstantial.

What may seem a rather mystical concept to the modern reader was considerably more prosaic to the Hittites, for whom the universe was a continuum.²² No red line demarcated the sphere of the gods from that of human beings, nor indeed that of humankind from the realm of the dead. In his person, the Hittite king constituted the node at which the celestial and chthonic segments of the ancient cosmos articulated with the society of living mortal men and women. As the linchpin of this universe, the king mediated between gods and humans, conveying divine commands to the people of Ḫatti and in his prayers representing the interests of the latter to their gods.

This association with the divine world, far closer than that enjoyed by any other human being in Ḫatti, implied that to a certain extent the Hittite monarch partook of the purity and numinous nature of the gods, with the accompanying privileges and restrictions. Special purity regulations governed the domestic service of the

to Hans G. Güterbock (ed. H. A. Hoffner & G. Beckman; AS 23; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1986) 39–49, esp. fig. 4.

21. KUB 41.23 ii 18'–21' with dupl. KUB 57.86 (CTH 458.10A). For transliteration, see van den Hout, *BiOr* 52 (1995) 560.

22. G. Beckman, "Religion. B. Bei den Hethitern," *RIA* 11 (2007) 333–8.



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king,²³ just as those who attended to the gods had to follow strict rules of decorum and cleanliness. For instance, the ruler's chariot could be upholstered only with leather from cattle raised under special conditions,²⁴ and woe to any kitchen servant who allowed a hair from someone else's head to contaminate the king's water supply!²⁵ And although he was the final judicial instance in Ḫatti, it was forbidden for those guilty of certain sexual offences to appear before him.²⁶ Significantly, these same offenders were also prohibited from becoming priests of the gods.

The use of the royal title "My Sun-God" certainly set the ruler apart from and above his fellow humans.²⁷ Finally, not only the king but also other members of the immediate royal family received offerings posthumously as part of the state cult.²⁸

I interpret this phenomenon as the realization of Hittite family religion on the highest societal level. Just as each family was responsible for honoring and sustaining its ancestors, so was the entire society obligated to care for the dead of its leading clan.

The queen too was an exalted being. At Fraktin (Fig. 1) Queen Puduḫepa presents a mirror image of the goddess she worships. But since nearly all depictions of female personages in Hittite art follow a single stereotype, it is perhaps more significant that Sun-goddesses associated with several departed queens of the earlier Empire period (for example, "the Sun-goddess of Arinna of Ašmunikkal") receive individual offerings during the *nuntarriyašḫa*-festival.²⁹ This suggests that the Hittite queen was also somehow consubstantial with her counterpart at the head of the female portion of the pantheon of Ḫatti. The hierarchy prevailing in the community of the Hittite gods is best captured by the familiar central panel at Yazılıkaya in which the Storm-god syncretized with Hurrian Teššub meets the Sun-goddess of Arinna identified with Ḫebat.³⁰

Indeed, Hittite monarchs occasionally indicate their closeness to the divine through claims of familial relationship similar to those we encounter in texts of the kings of the Ur III dynasty, especially those in praise of Šulgi.³¹ For instance, the generic ruler in a building ritual refers to "My father, the Storm-god,"³² and in a prayer, Muwattalli II addresses his personal god:

O Storm-god of Lightning, my lord. I was but a human, while my father was a priest of the Sun-goddess of Arinna and all the gods (i.e., king of Ḫatti). My father

23. CTH 265, edited by F. Pecchioli Daddi, "Palace Servants and Their Obligations," *Or* 73 (2004) 451–68.

24. KUB 13.3 iii 9–13; Pecchioli Daddi, *Or* 73 (2004) 461, 466.

25. KUB 13.3 ii 26'–iii 2; Pecchioli Daddi, *Or* 73 (2004) 460–1, 466–7.

26. Hittite Laws §§199–200; ed. H. A. Hoffner, *The Laws of the Hittites* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 157–58.

27. G. Beckman, "My Sun-God"—Reflections of Mesopotamian Conceptions of Kingship among the Hittites," in *MELAMMU Symposia III* (ed. A. Panaino & G. Pettinato; Milan: Università di Bologna, 2003) 37–43.

28. CTH 660; ed. H. Otten, "Die hethitischen 'Königslisten' und die altorientalische Chronologie," *MDOG* 83 (1951) 47–71.

29. CTH 626; see M. Nakamura, *Das hethitische nuntarriyašḫa-Fest* (PIHANS 94; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2002) 192–204. For a list of these goddesses, see B. H.L. van Gessel, *Onomasticon of the Hittite Pantheon* (HdO I 33/2; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 878.

30. K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter*, fig. 239.

31. See in general J. Klein, *The Royal Hymns of Shulgi of Ur: Man's Quest for Immortal Fame* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), and in particular, P. Michalowski, "The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (ed. N. Brisch; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2008) 36–7.

32. KUB 29.1 (CTH 414) i 24, 26.



begat me, but the Storm-god of Lightning took me from my mother and reared me; he made me the priest of the Sun-goddess of Arinna and all the gods. He appointed me to kingship for Ḫatti.³³

As several contributors to the conference on Religion and Power held in 2007 at Chicago's Oriental Institute demonstrated,³⁴ in many pre-modern societies, including those of ancient Mesopotamia, the monarch always partakes of the sacred, even when he is not explicitly classed as a deity. If the individual incumbent is not held to be a god, the office itself is nevertheless considered to be divine. The Sumerians held that kingship had descended from Heaven, and earlier generations of Europeans could exclaim, "The king is dead. Long live the king!"³⁵

It is most important, however, to stress that the divine determinative is never employed with any royal name in the Hittite cuneiform or hieroglyphic sources, and that there is no evidence in the cuneiform record for the worship of a living ruler. But at death, the king—or indeed the queen or one of their children—moved up a notch in the cosmic hierarchy. He or she was promoted from a sacred human being to a minor deity. In my opinion, this idea is once again a development of the basic ideas of the Hittite domestic cult: Every family was exposed to the influence of its deceased members, presumably for good, but most definitely for ill. An angry ghost could cause severe trouble for his or her descendants as well as enemies.³⁶ And in the same way that the command of the living king was qualitatively more influential than that of the ordinary householder, so the spirit of the departed ruler was immeasurably more powerful than an ordinary ghost. That is, king (*ḫaššuš*): commoner (*antuḫšaš*): god (DINGIR): ghost (GIDIM).

Thus the apparent dilemma with which we began does not really exist. King Ḫattušili III, for instance, was not really a god, but he was much more than an ordinary man. In his capacity as ruler, and in particular as highest priest of all the deities of the Hittite pantheon, he partook of the divine and could be pictured wearing the horns of divinity. But it was only when he had shed his mortal coil that he truly "became a god."

33. KUB 6.45+ (CTH 381) iii 26–31. Translation after I. Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (WAW 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) 91.

34. Proceedings published in *Religion and Power* (note 31 above). See especially the contributions of I. Winter, M. Gilbert, & J. Cooper.

35. Cf. E. H. Kantorowicz's classic *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957).

36. See A. Ünal, *Ḫattušili III. I/1* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1974) 102 n. 47 for a list of passages in oracle texts in which the cause of the displeasure of particular revenants is investigated.

