



LOST IN TRANSLATION. AN EGYPTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EGYPTIAN-HITTITE TREATIES

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ABSTRACT: During the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1077 BCE) and especially from the mid-18th Dynasty onwards, relations between Egypt and Ḫatti played a key-role in the historical, political and cultural development of the then Syria-Palestine region. It is the aim of this article to discuss the development of these relations based on textual evidence presented in the Egyptian material, with special attention given to a series of bilateral parity treaties concluded between the respective rulers of Ḫatti and Egypt.

KEY WORDS: Egypt – Ḫatti – relations – treaties

A primary source for our understanding of the political, economic, and legal relations between Egypt and the Hittite kingdom during the 13th century BCE undoubtedly represents the “Eternal,” or “Silver Treaty,” concluded between Ramesse II and Ḫattusili III (KRI II, 79–85).² The text of the treaty itself implies that such a legal tradition already extended back to the 15th or 14th century BCE at the latest with the so-called Kuruštama treaty as one of its primary examples. It is important to stress that the “exclusiveness” of the “Eternal Treaty” rests largely in the fact that both versions – the Hittite one written in Akkadian and the Egyptian one – have been extensively preserved and thus remain the objects of an intense study. Discussing the subject from an Egyptological perspective and taking into consideration only the evidence preserved in the Egyptian language we cannot say much about the earlier legal agreements or provisions concluded between the two Great Powers, Egypt and Ḫatti. Leaving aside the Amarna letter of the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I addressed to Ḫuriya (EA 41; CTH 153) in which the Hittite king

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² See Spalinger 1979; Kestemont 1982; Edel 1997; Klengel 2002; Breyer 2010; for a chronology of the relations see recently Devecchi – Miller 2010.

refers to a request by the Pharaoh's "father" to "establish only the most friendly relations between us," (EA 41: 8–9), the "Eternal Treaty" is the only document preserved in the Egyptian language implicitly referring to the existence of an earlier legal provision or provisions between Egypt and Hatti.

KRI II, 228: 1–2; Edel 1997: 28*

K, l. 14: *jr p3 nt-^c mtj wn dj m-h3w s-p-l-l-<m> [p3] wr 3 n ht m-mjt.t p3 nt-^c mtj wn m-h3w m-w-t-l p3 wr 3 n ht p3y=j jjj mh=j jm=f*

"As for the 'witnessed/precise/*mtj*' legal provision (*p3 nt-^c mtj*) which was here in the time of Šuppiluliu<*m*>, the Great Ruler of Hatti, as well as the 'witnessed/precise/*mtj*' legal provision (*p3 nt-^c mtj*) which existed in the time of Mu<*w*>talli, the Great Ruler of Hatti, my father (= predecessor?), I hold it firm."

From the perspective of Egyptian history, the relations between Egypt and Hatti date back to much earlier times and can be undoubtedly traced to the reign of Thutmose III (ca. 1479–1425 BCE). In his extensive Annals the "presents" (*jnw*) from the "Great Hatti"³ are mentioned for the first time in the context of Thutmose's eighth military campaign against Mitanni in Year 33, followed by another occasion in the 41st Year of his reign.⁴ The reconstruction of the events mentioned in Year 35⁵ and Year 42,⁶ when either the names of Hatti or "Great Hatti" are being inserted in the respective lacunae, remains rather problematic as the reconstructions are most probably based only on the individual commodities mentioned in the respective passages – i.e. silver, gold and wood in Year 35 and silver vessels, lapis lazuli, wood and ore in Year 42.⁷ The reign of Thutmose III is also the time when the tomb of Menkheperreseneb (TT 86) was constructed in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna in Western Thebes. On the northern wall of the eastern part of the hall⁸ a delivery of "presents" (*jnw*) is depicted containing – among representatives of other countries and regions – a Hittite representative bringing the presents of Hatti. In return for their presents "the breath of life" (*ḫwn ḥnh*)⁹ is given to them signaling the establishment or confirming the existence of some kind of a tie between the two parties. Similarly to the Hittite embassies at the time of Thutmose III yet another embassy of Hatti is mentioned following the military campaign of Thutmose III's successor Amenhotep II (ca. 1427–1397 BCE) in his Year 9.¹⁰ On this particular occasion the representatives of Hatti, Babylon and Mitanni are coming to obtain from the Pharaoh not only "the breath of life" (*rdj.t ḫwn ḥnh*; from the Pharaoh) but even more, namely to "request peace" (*dbḥ ḥtp.w*).¹¹

As becomes clear from the overview given here the Egyptian records attesting the simple existence of the Egyptian-Hittite relations prior to the Amarna period are very limited. The combination of the retrospective data contained in the "Eternal Treaty"

³ *Urk.* IV, 701: 11–14.

⁴ *Urk.* IV, 727: 13–14.

⁵ *Urk.* IV, 713: 13–16.

⁶ *Urk.* IV, 732–733.

⁷ *Urk.* IV, *passim*, followed recently by Redford 2003: 250.

⁸ Davies 1933: Pl. IV, west wall: north side, *sic!*

⁹ For references consult Lorton 1974: 136–144.

¹⁰ *Urk.* IV, 1309: 13–20; 1326: 1–13.

¹¹ Lorton 1974: 144–147.

and those preserved in the Hittite documents makes it obvious that during the earlier part of the 18th Dynasty by the reign of Amenhotep III by latest, a legal provision between Egypt and Ḫatti had been concluded, identifiable with the so-called Kuruštama treaty. The opinion on the exact date of this act differs extensively¹² with the reign of Thutmose III,¹³ Amenhotep II¹⁴ or Amenhotep III (ca. 1388–1351 BCE)¹⁵ being the most often considered options. Nevertheless, even an earlier dating to the reign of Thutmose I (ca. 1506–1493 BCE) or to the time of Thutmose IV (ca. 1397–1388 BCE) and thus preceding the reign of the latest of the possible candidates on the Egyptian side, have not been ruled out completely.

The fact that we do not have any direct Egyptian evidence for such a treaty from such an early period forces us to use other sets of data that can illustrate the situation. In order to identify traces or reflections of such a document in other sources, we have to start first with a better known context which can give us an outline for further discussion.

In regards to the legal aspects of the relations between Egypt and Ḫatti, the “Eternal” treaty still must be of prime interest. It is clearly stated in the Egyptian version of the document that it was in Year 21, 1st month of *pṛt*, day 21 of Ramesse II that the royal envoys arrived bringing the silver tablet “which the Great Ruler of Ḫatti, Ḫattušili [had caused] to be brought to the Pharaoh, LPH, to request peace from the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Wesermaatre Setepenre, son of Re, Ramesse-Meriamun, given life eternally, like his father Re daily.” (Kitchen 1996: 80)

Setting the document into the Egyptian legal context it is obvious that the “Eternal” treaty to a great extent represents a foreign element resulting from a given situation. Based on the written evidence we can clearly see that – undoubtedly after a series of negotiations – the cuneiform document had been delivered from the Hittite royal court to the Egyptian royal court in Pi-Ramesse and only subsequently the Egyptian version (in cuneiform) has been delivered to Ḫatti. The Egyptian text recorded on the walls of the Karnak temple and the Ramesseum therefore represents a translation from the Akkadian text, which is a fact distinguishable on the linguistic level of the document. As it has been already mentioned the mere idea of a treaty between the Egyptian king and his royal partner might represent a rather foreign, though not completely unknown concept in the Egyptian *milieu*. The need to produce a translation of such a document undoubtedly placed extensive demands on those who were in charge of the translation. Although in the time of Ramesse II a group of highly specialized scribes capable of reading and writing letters in Akkadian existed, the nature and/or the uniqueness of the document represented great difficulties. The Egyptian scribes were forced not only to maintain the wording of the treaty but also to transfer into the Egyptian language concepts not autochthonous in the Egyptian culture.

The very first element which might have actually posed a problem for the translation would be the identification of the act or document in itself. For the general identification of the document the word *p3 nt-5* was chosen; a word well-attested in the domestic material for a “regulation, custom, ceremony” or – in the later periods – even a “ritual”, adjusting its meaning for the international or diplomatic context.¹⁶

¹² In the period between the reign of Thutmose III and Thutmose IV (Schulman 1977–1978: 112–113; 1988: 58).

¹³ Sørenhagen 1985: 22–38; Bryan 1991: 360, nn. 32–33; Bryce 1999: 129.

¹⁴ Murnane 1990: 33; Bryan 1991: 337, n. 32; recently Simon 2007: 381; Spalinger 1981: 358, n. 93.

¹⁵ Kitchen 1962: 22, n. 1; Schulman 1964: 69, n. 125; *id.* 1977–1978; *id.* 1988: 67–68; Cline 1998: 243–244.

¹⁶ See recently Mynářová 2013 with further literature.

The “Eternal” treaty is not the very first document in which the term is used within such a socio-political context. Once again in the Annals of Thutmose III the expression is employed for some kind of a legal provision concluded between the Egyptian king and some of the client kings, their seats located on the Lebanese coast, whose activities and loyalty towards the Egyptian king and his administration might have been crucial for maintaining the Egyptian economic and political interests within the region – “Behold, the ports were provided with every (sort of) thing, according to their income, (which was) according to their provision(s) of every year, and the trade goods of the Lebanon were according to their provision(s) of every year.” (*Urk. IV, 700: 6–9*) or in its abbreviated form, “Behold, every port was provided with every (sort of) good thing, according to their provision(s) of every year.” (*Urk. IV, 719: 7–11; 723: 4–9; 732: 6–8*) Unfortunately, in the Egyptian documents the real nature of such provision(s) is not specified any further and of course, none of this applies to the relationship between Egypt and Hatti.

It has been already mentioned that the word employed to identify the legal provision in the “Eternal Treaty” was *p3 nt-^c* “provision, regulation”, which in the preamble of the document is further particularized – in what I believe is the complete “title” of the text – as *p3 nt-^c nfr n htp n sns n* “the *nfr* provision of peace and brotherhood” (K; l. 7). In this respect it is important to stress that the foregoing legal provisions mentioned in the document are identified more specifically as *p3 nt-^c mtj*, with *mtj* understood as something “precise, concluded or witnessed” (*p3 nt-^c mtj*; K, l. 14), that means the “witnessed/precise legal provision”. On the other hand and in a kind of a contraposition to the identification of the legal provisions concluded in ancestral times stands the identification of the present document as *p3 nt-^c nfr n htp n sns n* “the *nfr* provision of peace and brotherhood” (K; l. 7), usually translated as the “good treaty of peace and brotherhood”. In this context yet another translation can be suggested, more accurately describing its contents. In Egyptian the adjective *nfr* – among other meanings – can be also used to describe “younger/fresh” or a metaphorically “present” subject, in this case the document. By means of using the expression *p3 nt-^c nfr* the Egyptian scribes could send a signal that the legal provision of “peace and brotherhood” applied to this particular document. The practice of requesting the “peace” attested in the Egyptian documents has been already mentioned above and it is necessary to discuss the second part of the phrase, namely the “brotherhood”.

Once again, the Egyptian substantive *sns n* “brotherhood” represents a translation of the Akkadian expression *ahhūtum* with the same “meaning”. It is not uninteresting to note that the Egyptian word is written with the determinative Gardiner Y 1, representing a papyrus rolled up, tied and sealed. Within the sphere of the international politics the word is, as far as I am aware, employed exclusively in the inscriptions of Ramesse II, namely the “Eternal Treaty” (Year 21; Karnak) and the texts of the first marriage with a Hittite princess (Year 34; Amara-West, Abu Simbel, Elephantine and Karnak).

Conclusions

Although the evidence is rather narrow, based on the given evidence we can still try to deduce a general outline or a scenario for the nature and the respective development of the Egyptian-Hittite relations. Some of the preliminary conclusions can be further

applied to a better understanding of the ancient Egyptian procedures related to the “outside” world. In a certain way, the Egyptian evidence might actually reflect a sort of a gradual development in these relations. No relations can exist without being established, that is an undisputed fact. Based on the Egyptian evidence it seems that the establishment of the relations between Egypt and Ḫatti had been realized by means of economic factors, witnessed in the Egyptian iconographical evidence as the Hittites bringing their “presents” (*ḫnw*) to the Egyptian court. After the initial phase (which we may roughly place into the reign of Thutmose III) had been completed, a further elaboration and formalization of the relationship followed. The “presents” were still given but in return the “breath of life” (*ḫw n ḥh*) – with “life” representing a kind of an oath or an agreement (as known from other Egyptian documents) – was requested from the Pharaoh. At this moment some kind of a legal tie between the respective parties was postulated (ca. in the reign of Amenhotep II) and the process might eventually culminate by the conclusion of a legal provision or treaty (ca. in the reign of Amenhotep II or Thutmose IV). It is highly unlikely that all foreign rulers would be able to reach such a climax and we may suppose that the “the (good) provision of peace [*ḫtp(w)*] and brotherhood” as the legal provision is identified in the “Eternal Treaty”, could have been reserved only for a very narrow group of individuals, including the kings of Ḫatti and Mitanni. We cannot rule out the possibility that there were also two different levels – for those obtaining the “peace” only and those reaching the peak by concluding the legal provision consisting of both elements, the “peace” and the “brotherhood” being a loan concept widely used in the Near Eastern juridical sphere and adjusted to be used in the Egyptian documents as well.

None of the arguments presented here, unfortunately, allows us to date more precisely the foregoing legal provisions concluded between the rulers of Ḫatti and Egypt. On the other hand it is clear that a detailed and careful study of the terminology of the “Eternal Treaty” allows us to obtain a more complex picture of the ancient Egyptian international politics during the 14th and 13th centuries BCE.

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Abbreviations

- CTH Laroche, Emmanuel. *Catalogue des Textes Hittites*. Paris, 1971.
- EA Knudtzon, Jørgen A. *Die El-Amarna Tafeln*. Anmerkungen und Register bearbeitet von C. Weber und E. Ebeling, Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 2. Leipzig, 1907–1915.
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