



Hattice

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Hattian

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The Hattian language

Hattian was a non Indo-European language spoken by the Hattians in ancient Anatolia. We have a very limited knowledge about Hattians and Hattian language and we cannot even set an approximate time-frame for the spoken language. (cf. Figs. 1-2).

It is also noteworthy that Hattian is not included in *the Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages* among the other ancient Anatolian languages or in the handbook of *The Ancient Languages of Asia Minor* (but see Meillet & Cohen 1952: 198-199).

Some general problems:

- a. The written documentation at our disposal is so fragmentary that it is difficult to build up an organic and systematic *corpus*. This means that even if the fragments are substantial, we have no such duplicates through which we could better detect possible errors.
- b. We cannot determine when and where oral and/or written Hattian tradition (if ever existed) was fixed by the Hittites.
- c. We do not know whether Hattian was a spoken language utilized by part of the Anatolian population or whether it had been already become a sacral language, only to be used for ritual purposes, by the time the Hittites began to write it down.
- d. We cannot prove that the Hattian language was already dead during the Old Hittite Kingdom (from the second half of 17th century to 15th century BCE), even though it may have been replaced at some point by Hittite (both as a written and standard language) and by Luwian as a vernacular.
- e. There is a strong anisomorphism in textual transmission.
- f. It is difficult to reconstruct the graphematic structure and the orthographical rules of Hattian.

Hattian has, unusually for the area of that time, quite long chains of prefixes together with shorter suffixing chains. Although many attempts have been made to link it to some of the Caucasian languages spoken today, its relationships remain unclear.

According to three major hypotheses, Hattian is:

- a. a Northwest Caucasian language (Abkhazo-Adyghean language family)
- b. a Northeast Caucasian language (Daghestanian language family)
- c. a South Caucasian language (traditional Cartvelian language family)

Other minor hypotheses, widespread during the first half of the last century and recently reemerging, number Hattian among the supposed Déne-Sino-Caucasian language family or Aegean-Anatolian substrate languages. However, all of these hypotheses are very weak.

Hattian is an agglutinative language. This signifies that all the morphemes, both grammatical and lexical, when attached one to another, remain always distinguishable and any single morpheme brings one single linguistic function. These morphemes can be prefixes and/or suffixes attached to nominal stems:

e.g. $kā=ḥanwa_a\check{s}uit=\bar{u}n$ = “on the throne”

$kā$ = local prefix = “on”+

$ḥanwa_a\check{s}uit$ = nominal stem = “throne”+

V(n) = oblique case suffix

It is often problematic to trace the phonological system of the Hattian language. For instance /e/ and /i/ can hardly be distinguished. This is due in part to the orthographic conventions used in the Hittite texts which entail several graphematic incoherence. It is also a tricky issue to detect the phonetic value beyond the graphemic alternation of <u> and <ú> (/o/ /u/?).

The same can be said for the quantity of vowels and for the quality of consonants (e.g. voiced occlusives /b/, /d/, /g/ and voiceless /p/, /t/, /k/).

The alleged ergativity of the Hattian language is a matter of old debate. Since the results of previous studies are not completely exhaustive, nothing conclusive can be drawn.

'Hattian' written documentation

The main archaeological find spots of Hattian written documentation are Ḫattuša, modern Boğazköy, almost 150 km East from Ankara and Šapinuwa, modern Ortaköy, about 50 km South-East from Çorum. (Fig. 3).

Hattian has no pragmalinguistic autonomy, since the bulk of the information we are able to glean actually comes to us through alien sources (Hittite documents). Nonetheless, problems connected to the translation from Hattian into Hittite have been recently reconsidered (e.g. Rizza 2007, 2009).

Hittites defined the Hattian language in their texts as *ḫattili* "in the language of Ḫatti".

Most scholars agree on the assumption that the Hittite copyists had a scant understanding not only of the Hattian rituals and incantations (the two major text categories in which Hattian language is attested), but, most importantly, of the Hattian language itself. Others assume that the Hattian texts often reflect dictation rather than being a mere scholarly concoction. We have Hattian text fragments, Hittite text containing untranslated Hattian words or clauses and Hattian-Hittite bilingual texts (see the last count of fragments by Goedegebuure 2010: 949, n. 3 and the chronological distribution of all these texts in Fig. 4). Hattian is chiefly preserved in Hittite religious texts, in which the language appears to serve liturgical functions. Within the bulk of 'Hattian' written documentation there are three important Hattian-Hittite bilinguals (cf. <http://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/CTH/index.php?l=hattisch>):

1. KUB 2.2+ (CTH 725): 'Laying the foundation stone' ritual [*Sammeltafel*] (editions by Schuster 1974; Corti & Torri 2011) Ex. in Figs. 5-8;
2. KBo 37.1 (CTH 726) a temple foundation ritual (editions by Klinger 1996; Schuster 2002; Torri 2011);
3. KUB 28.4 (CTH 727) the Myth of the 'Moon-god falling from the sky' (edition by Schuster 2002).

The Hattians

Even if language and ethnicity usually have an important correlation, it is always difficult to reconstruct ethnicity solely on the basis of language. Therefore it would be better to refer to Hattians as a population group or a language community.

According to a prevailing ethno-linguistic theory, the Indo-European (Proto-?) Hittites entered Anatolia at least as far back as the very beginning of 3rd millennium (but not all scholars agree on that), where they first came across the precursors of Hattians and Hurrians. On the basis of this theory, Hattians should be considered indigenous to Anatolia and their language a 'substrate language'. Recent studies have, in some way, changed the general view. Thus, at present it cannot be proved that Hattians were that peaceful, matriarchal society of Anatolia fiercely attacked by the incoming Hittites around 1800-1750 BCE, as it has been previously assumed.

The matter is quite far from being resolved and lies indeed within the major ‘*Quaestiones Hethiticae*’.

During the first half of the past century, archaeologists suggested that the material culture of Early Bronze Age central Anatolia had ‘definitely a native Anatolian character’. The Hattians may then have been the people of the Early Bronze Age kingdoms of central Anatolia. For many decades attention has been drawn to the royal tombs of Alaca Höyük (Figs. 9). Many scholars believe that the burial methods used at Alaca Höyük and the ‘royal artifacts’ which the graves contained could have been made by native people, namely the Hattians. Others claim that the ‘royal objects’ as solar discs and theriomorphic standards are symbols of Indo-European élites (figs. 10-14), but such theories are by no means universally accepted. Since all the scholarly theories proposed hitherto have no firm evidence, and due to the very limited data available to us, the outline of any concrete ethno-political scenario deserves further investigations.

Hattian and Hittite cultures and religions?

The few texts which contain Hattian or Hittite translation of Hattian and bilingual texts are predominantly religious or cultic in character. They provide us with the names of a number of Hattian deities, as well as Hattian personal and place-names. It is a matter of fact that the Hittites have adopted many elements of Hattian culture and religious beliefs. It is even difficult to separate an official Hittite religion from the Hattian elements present therein. Since the very beginning of the Old Hittite Kingdom, the Hittites borrowed from the Hattian culture the name of the land (Ḫatti), the ideology of kingship and so many elements of the state institutions. Hence, it is impossible to speak of a Hittite culture, especially when one refers to the Old Kingdom, without dealing with the Hattian cultural substrates or adstrates. Hattian deities play a key role in the pantheon of the Hittites. The Hittite state cult documents always refer to Hattian deities or gods bearing Hattian names.

Even though many attempts have been made in recent years to separate an autonomous Hattian cultural layer from the Hittite state cult, much doubt persists in regard to the possibility of defining a Hattian state cult or a Hattian cultural tradition on its own.

The so-called ‘Hittite myths’ often include references to the Hattian world such as Hattian gods’ names, worship, cult institutions and holy places. The same applies to the Anatolian rituals, often erroneously termed Hittite rituals that, in fact, include strong elements of Hurrian, Luwian and Hattian culture.

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