

# The kingdom of the hittites history essay



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Two Archaeologist who were among the first ones to take an interest in the Hittites were the French adventurer-explorer called Charles Texier (1834), and British scholar called Archibald Henry Sayce (1876), who gave lectures to the Society of Biblical Archaeology about a group of people referred to in the Bible as the Hittites. Sayce puts forward a bold new theory-that the Hittites, far from being an insignificant Canaanite tribe, were in fact the masters of a great and widespread empire extending throughout the Near East (Bryce, 2002, p2). The German archaeologist Hugo Winckler began excavating the site, examining over 1000 clay tablets which had been discovered. They were inscribed in the cuneiform script; the Hittites used cuneiform script on their writing. Hieroglyph form was also used and it was intended for ordinary people so that they would understand the contents (Sansal, 2010). Winckler was able to read a number of these tablets, since they are in the language called Akkadian, the international language of diplomacy in the second millennium BC. He discovered the Akkadian version of a treaty which the pharaoh Ramesses II drew up with Hattusili, king of the Hittites, in the twenty-first year of his reign. This, combined with other evidence, made it clear that the site under excavation is the Hittite capital, later to be identified as Hattusa (Bryce, 2002, p2). Today a lot of work is taking place at these sites on the supervision of German archaeologist.

Hittites chose to settle in Anatolia due to the rich source of timber and agricultural products of all kind, and more importantly an abundance of the mineral wealth which with the advance of the civilization became increasingly necessary. The mountains of Anatolia are rich in metal-deposits (MacQueen, 1986. P13-15)

Chronology remains a big problem when studying this region. Many of the dates established for the area are ultimately dependent on Egyptian sources. The Hittite history is divided into 3 phases - Old Kingdom 1680-1500, Middle Kingdom 1500-1430, Empire 1430-1200. Total collapse around 1180 BC. (Matthews, 2010)

A Hittite king was constantly inundated with decisions, as he was not only the supreme ruler, but also a judicial authority, high priest, and a military commander. All important matters in these fields had to be reported to the king. He had a large number of aristocrats and personages who possessed a significant amount of power and were assigned with vital roles in the kingdom. These men were always blood relatives of the king (Bryce, 2002, p16). Hattusili I, 1650-1620 BC was the first Hittite king to expand into north Syria, including Aleppo and Alalakh. This demonstrates the early value of access to sea and trade for Hittites as Hattusa is located rather far from the sea (Matthews, 2010). Hittite kings adopted Hatti names and were greatly inspired by Hatti civilization in their art, religion, culture and mythology (Sansal, 2010)

The army consisted of two main arms, infantry and chariots. The most important posts both in government and the army were given to the kings' blood relatives, eldest sons and brothers. The infantry had a small core of permanent troops who acted as the king's personal bodyguard and were responsible for frontier-patrols and the crushing of rebellions (Macqueen, 1986. P56).

Women also played an important part in the Hittites state. Queen Pudupepe, wife of Hattusili III, and the last queen of Suppiluliumas I were present in office until their husbands deaths and have been mentioned and portrayed in a number of clay tablets discovered (Gurney, 1990. P54).

About 200 Hittite laws which were inscribed on two tablets, enclose the laws of this great empire. These include punishments for agricultural defence, adultery, theft, murder, defiance in case of slaves and many other rules and punishments (Sansal, 2010). A large number of tablets have been discovered baring these laws from later periods which indicate that the same laws were kept by later kings. At the lowest level of society were slaves. A person could become a slave through debts, through indentured servitude, as punishment of a crime, or through warfare (Collin, 2007. 117). An owner appears to ave had virtually unlimited power in his treatment of his slaves Bryce, 2002. p52).

The art of fortification is an ancient one in Anatolia. A good example can be seen at the settlements in Hacilar II (c. 5400) which has an independent wall of mud brick between 1.5 and 3 m thick and provided with small towers which enabled the defenders to fire along the face of the wall. The slightly later (c. 5250) wall of Hacilar I are even bigger, and is built in a series of 'steps' to give a clear field for covering-fire in front of it ( Macqueen, 1986. P64). Many building had mud-brick on stone foundations, with upper storey, and some had storage for grains (Matthews, 2010)

Excavations show that streets had a strong tendency to be straight, and were usually well finished with a surface of coarse gravel. In an area where

almost every site was on sloping ground, systems of terracing were constantly necessary, many streets had large drainage-channels, running down the middle and connected to lesser channels or clay pipes which carried dirty water into them from the houses on either side (Macqueen, 1986. P70)

Agriculture played an important role in the economy of the Hittites. Some of the main crops included emmer-wheat and barley; but peas, beans, onions, flax, figs, olives, . Cattle, pigs, goats, sheep, horses, donkeys, dogs and were kept, and bees too were an important item (honey was important in diet). Daily diet consisted mainly of different sorts, of bread and cakes, milk, cheese, porridge or gruel, and meat and vegetable stews (Bryce, 2002, p74). There is evidence for the presence of doctors, builders, carpenters, goldsmiths, coppersmiths, potters, fishermen, and watchmen, although in many cases full-time professionals were employed only by the palace and temples (Macqueen, 1986. P97). Sometimes there is evidence for what can only be described as industrial areas, as trade played an important role in the economy and merchants from overseas visited the city often. These buildings can be especially in connection with metal-working, excavations show that these buildings could have functioned as a shop in some areas of the town.

Many seals have been discovered, but the signet-ring, like the cylinder-seal, was the exception, in the Hittite world. Newly- found seal-impressions which describe kuruntas as a ' Great King' suggest that he was for a time able to seize power in the capital and will thus have to be added to the list of the Hittite monarchs (Macqueen, 1986, p9, p101). Pottery of ' Hittite' type was in <https://assignbuster.com/the-kingdom-of-the-hittites-history-essay/>

use throughout central Anatolia and in many areas affected by Hittite political or military influence. Perhaps the most attractive c type of Hittite pottery is the vessel in the form of an animal (Gurney, 1990. p163-165).

Religion played an extremely important role among the Hittites, and it was involved mainly with serving the gods which in most cases was the weather gods Collin, 2007, p173-174). The kings prayed and made offerings to gods regularly at the temples dedicated to them. The temple was not only the building in which the great festivals took place, but also the home of the god throughout the year; inside it, he had his dining-room and his bedroom, and he had at his command a host of temple-servants attend to his every need (Bryce, 2002, p153). King Mursili II is best known among all the Hittite kings for his duty to gods and religion. This dedication to the gods and the vast number of temples built, was the main reason that Hattusa remained a capital throughout the years even though it was not the most ideal place to have as the centre of an empire mainly due to its extreme climate changes, the impossibility of the relocation of the gods temples made Hattusa the unchangeable capital. Most of the surviving evidence of temples relates to the official state-cult, little is known of local religious buildings, but inventories of their contents, preserved at the capital, tell us something of their furnishings and their festivals; the principal object in a shrine was a cult-image of normal size, usually a weapon, an animal or a huwasi-stone, an upright Stella set on a carved base (Macqueen, 1986, p111). Only towards the end of the Imperial period were these objects beginning to be replaced by anthropomorphic images, usually the gift of the king. Small buildings used

for cult purposes also existed in Hattusas itself, and several have recently been excavated in the southern part of the city.

Hittite art is basically naturalistic, in the sense that it portrays human beings, animals and occasionally objects. About three-quarters of a mile north-east of Bogazkoy lies Yazilikaya the most impressive of all Hittites religious structures. One of the gods depicted here is Teshub (Sansal, 2010). Here at a point where a spring of fresh water once flowed, is an outcrop of rock which forms two natural Chambers of different sizes; the problems with interpreting the sculptures of Yazihkaya in terms of find ritual and belief have certainly not all been solved (Macqueen, 1986, P 123-127). It has been pointed out by the excavators that the temple buildings, unlike those of the capital, were weakly constructed, and cannot have supported an upper storey; this suggests that they were not in daily use, but were reserved for some special function, perhaps an annual event (Bittel, 1970. P107-8)

Cremation was widespread in central Anatolia; from textual resources it is known to be the funerary custom of the Hittite Kings. The ordinary people of Hattusa, however, were either buried or cremated (Bryce, 2002. P176-7). At Bogazkoy, for instance, bodies were often buried in or near the houses. Burial gifts were few and poor in quality and no social distinction can be made in terms of types or location of burial (Macqueen, 1986. P133)

Hattusa is located at the southern end of the Budakozii Valley adjacent to the stream of the same name, which has cut a large cleft into the rocks to form a natural citadel that was settled already at the end of the Early Bronze Age; easily defensible, the citadel commanded a view of the entire Late

Bronze Age city called Buyikkale today (Bryce, 2002. P33). Here was located the palace, which was the residence of the king, his family, and their retinue, and, adjacent to it, the administrative buildings, including an extensive library and chancellery; the oldest part of the city is located in the Lower City to the north, in the ' area around and including the Great Temple (Bryce, 2002. P33). In this temple, priests saw to the needs of the Storm-God and Sun-Goddess, the divine couple who ruled the Hittite pantheon.

Three monumental gates are located in the southern part of the city. Each of the three gates is decorated with elaborate sculpture that helps to define their separate uses. From an artificial embankment at the highest and southernmost point of the city, known as Yerkapi, two carved sphinxes once looked down protectively upon the temple quarter; the gate was accessible from the outside only by two steep, narrow staircases and so is unlikely to have been a regular point of entrance to the city. Its narrow open gateway has a shrine-like feel, and it may have served primarily as the stage for religious celebrations (Collin, 2007. P35). A large tablet uniquely made of bronze found near the Sphinx Gate contains the text of a treaty between Tudhaliyas IV and his cousin Kuruntas king of Tarhuntassa, a son of Muwatallis, and gives important geographical information on south and south-west Anatolia (Macqueen, 1986. P8-9). The Lion Gate located near Temple 3, to the southwest, so-called because of the two massive lions in stone designed to impress those entering the city, probably served as the city's formal entrance for dignitaries and other important visitors (Collin, 2007, p35). A bronze sword of Aegean type, found outside the Lion Gate and inscribed with a dedication by Great king Tudhaliyas when he ' shattered the



Assuwa-country', is important confirmation of the Assuwa campaign of Tudhaliyas I and of early Hittite contact with the west and the Aegean coast (Macqueen, 1986. P8-9). The King's Gate with a deity carved in high relief on it, is believed to have been used primarily for special occasions, due to its very close distance from Temple 5. Professor Neve notes that Temple 5 with an area of 3, 000 m is the biggest sacred building in the upper city (Bryce, 2002. P242-3). To the south-east of the South Citadel In Hattusa, a large sacred pool has been revealed, some 92m by 65m in area, supplied by an aqueduct from the north of the king's Gate. At the western end of this pool is a large embankment, 100 m long and 30 m wide, under which are two barrel-vaulted chambers. One of those, built over an older water-channel, is decorated with the relief of a king and an inscription of suppiluliumas II which describes it as a ' sacred path to the underworld' (Macqueen, 1986. P8-9). These gates were also there to give protective aid of supernatural powers, by being designed to keep evil influences and evil men at bay.

Excavations show that in the ridge called Bulyukkaya, the Hittites built an extensive granary comprising rectangular cellars dug into the earth( Collin, 2007. P16), with a capacity to store some four to six thousand tons of grain totals, this indicated that the city prepared for siege and also for bad harvest years (Matthews, 2010). New excavations in the western part of the Upper City, dominated by Sarikale, have revealed that the area was settled already in the sixteenth century. The square structures dating to this period are thought to have been barracks for military troops, thus clearing up the mystery of where Hattusa's defenders resided (Collin, 2007).

There is focus on the new excavations (since 2001) in the western part of the Upper City in the valley west of the rock of Sarikale, which may provide evidence of the elusive residential quarter. One major challenge remaining for excavators is to find a royal tomb (Collin, 2007. P16).

In the south-west the Shipwreck near Uluburun, east of Kas, has provided a rich cargo which includes copper, tin, gold, glass, ivory, ebony, amber, ostrich-egg shell, terebinth resin, pellets or purple murex dye, a scarab of Nefertiti, and a wooden folding writing tablet, as well as a wide assortment of jewellery, weapons, tools, weights and other equipment; the wreck vastly increases our understanding of international sea-trade and also of shipbuilding techniques c. 1300 BC. (Macqueen, 1986)

#### Conclusions:

The Hittite empire collapsed around 1180 BC, at end of the late Bronze Age. Early in the twelfth century, the royal capital Hattusa was destroyed by fire, and with its destruction the Anatolian kingdom of the Hittite came to an abrupt end. This occurred within the situation of the widespread upheavals linked with the fall down of many Bronze Age kingdoms throughout the Near East and mainland Greece (Bryce, 2002. P9) . This empire had a fragile political unit, perhaps due to the location of its capital and the great mixture of people living within it, which made union rather more difficult and sensitive. Harvests were failing, and grain had to be imported from as far afield as Egypt to ward off famine, which caused the empire to be on the edge. Hittites disappeared from central Anatolia but survived as small Iron Age kingdoms in the south east of Turkey and northern Syria; these are the

peoples referred to in the Bible, whom we call Neo-Hittites (Matthews, 2010). While Hittitology continues to be a dynamic and evolving field of study, it is nevertheless still a relatively young and relatively small field, and there is still much to learn about its people and history.