

Behind Hittite Lines

The battle of Kadesh has been a topic of much discussion, and is indeed a vital source of evidence with regard to our understanding of military operations during the second millennium BCE.¹ That aside, it is also highly valuable to use as a starting point from which to assess the internal politics and the reasons that were behind the eventual treaty between Ramesses II of Egypt, and Hattusili III of Hatti, in the former's 21st year of reign. The treaty, initiated by Hattusili III, came after a period of great animosity between the two rival kingdoms. What was it then that convinced these two 'Great Kings', to abandon hostility and enter into a relationship of 'Brotherhood' and co-operation?

From looking at ancient sources, in particular the Egyptian version of events,² one could easily be persuaded by the hyperbole of Egyptian interpretation that Ramesses II had full control of the situation in Syria and therefore, the upper hand in decisions behind the treaty. However, this form of style and presentation are typical of Egyptian ideology and it was in fact Hatti that had control over important border territories such as Amurru.³ Egypt was undoubtedly a powerful rival, but having the territorial advantage the Hittites did, why did Hattusili III feel a treaty was needed?

Looking at the treaty, some conclusions to this question could be drawn, and the idea that possibly Hattusili III was more concerned with the politics within his country and the loyalty of his subjects, than any actual military threat from Egypt.⁴ In comparing the two, both the Hittite and Egyptian versions seem to be mostly identical but there are some

¹ Morris (2005), p. 362.

² For translations of the battle of Kadesh see Breasted (1962), pp. 142-157. See also the 'Poem of the Battle of Kadesh' in Kitchen (1996), pp. 2-14.

³ After the battle, Hatti had control of Kadesh, Amurru and had even pushed the Egyptians back as far south as Aba giving them a comfortable 'buffer-zone'; see Bryce (1992), pp. 261-262.

⁴ Liverani (2001), pp. 133.

exceptions,⁵ as noted by Langdon and Gardiner (1920). In the opening to both, there is a subtle difference in the references to the kings (Ramesses II and Hattusili III), which again highlights Egyptian ideology. The cuneiform tablets for example,⁶ make no distinction between the two and both are referred to as *šarru rabû* (Great King). In the Egyptian text however, the pharaoh is referred to as *ḥqꜣ ʿꜣ n kmt* (Great King of Egypt) and the Hittite king as *wr ʿꜣ n ḥtꜣ* (Great Prince of Hatti). It is worth noting however, that this practice was used by the Egyptians to distinguish the pharaoh from any foreign rulers, rather than to show any contempt toward the Hittite king.⁷

Another difference between texts is the clause referring to the legitimacy of Hattusili III's rule to be acknowledged by Ramesses II, and also that the pharaoh should provide protection to his successors. This seems to reflect the insecurities Hattusili III may have had towards rival nobility in Hatti, and also from Urhi-Tesup who at the time was seeking refuge in Egypt.⁸ There is no such clause applied to Ramesses II, and indeed the idea that an Egyptian king would need assistance from a foreign king in the matter of succession, would have been completely in conflict with Egyptian ideology.⁹ Furthermore, an interesting detail which should be noted is the omission of both Muwatalli and Urhi-Tesup, from the genealogy contained at the beginning of both the Hittite and Egyptian versions.¹⁰ This might also be concluded as an intention by Hattusili III to authenticate the legitimacy of his claim as ruler and again highlights his political insecurity, and potentially the reason why a treaty was needed.

⁵ The Egyptian version (Karnak and Ramessum stela), represents the translations from the Akkadian version written on a silver tablet: the Hittite version is written from a copy of a tablet addressed from Ramesses II to Hattusili III; see Spalinger (1981), p. 299.

⁶ Discovered by Hugo Winckler at Boghazkoi in 1906; see Luckenbill (1921), p. 161.

⁷ Spalinger (1981), p. 302.

⁸ Bryce (1999), pp. 292-293.

⁹ Liverani (2001), p. 133.

¹⁰ Spalinger (1981), p. 309.

The Hittite political structure, compared by Van de Mieroop (2009), as to that of ‘medieval western European vassalage’,¹¹ was governed over by a ‘Great King’ and included a number of vassal states and ‘buffer-zones’. While many of the key states were ruled over by minor Hittite kings (Carchemish for example, who was also a relative), many (the ‘buffer-zones’) remained under their own rule. An important factor in maintaining and strengthening relationships between these states was through the marriage of a minor king to a female relation of the ‘Great King’.¹² So while these autonomous states did have some power, it was ultimately the ‘Great King’ who had authority over the land.¹³ It was this structure, however, that would provide problems for Hattusili III during his battle for power with Urhi-Tesup. Despite rallying enough support against his nephew to usurp him, there did not seem to be unfaltering loyalty from the nobility of Hatti.¹⁴ Doubtless then, much of his time would have been spent trying to reconcile those who opposed him and certifying his legal position as king.¹⁵ Hattusili III’s ‘Apology’ seems to have been composed to justify this usurpation of Urhi-Tesup to the influential members of Hittite society,¹⁶ and an attempt to secure his line of succession.

In addition to this need to stabilise his station as ‘Great King’ within his own borders, Hattusili III would have been intent on securing his position from rival kingdoms: recognition from other ‘Great Kings’ would help to fortify his claim against his nephew as rightful ruler.¹⁷ Anxiety of status from opposing kingdoms was a typical feature of Bronze Age diplomacy,¹⁸ and Hattusili III’s position was definitely precarious. He sort to reconcile with Assyria as situations between the two had been increasingly strained during Urhi-Tesup’s

¹¹ Van de Mieroop (2009), p. 162.

¹² Benteshina, King of Amurru for example was married to a daughter of Hattusili III; see Bryce (1999), p. 294.

¹³ Kuhrt (2000), pp. 267-268.

¹⁴ Bryce (1999), pp. 288-289.

¹⁵ Brand (2007), p. 26.

¹⁶ Collins (2007), p. 58.

¹⁷ Brand (2007), p. 22.

¹⁸ Avruch (2000).

reign. The lost vassal state of Hanigalbat had renewed its allegiance with Hatti and in doing so had incurred the retaliation of Assyria,¹⁹ who had in turn re-claimed the land causing it in turn to lose its vassal status. Rowton (1959) writes that it was Hattusili III who had been on the throne, and that it was he, whom had refused in writing, to refer to the Assyrian king, Adad-Nirari, as ‘Great King’. It seems now however, to have been during the reign of Urhi-Teshup that the defeat of Wasasatta of Hanigalbat had taken place.²⁰ If this attack had happened later, and it was indeed Hattusili III whom had sent the letter, then tensions with, and possible attacks from Assyrian, could have been a reason behind the need for a treaty with Egypt. But as Bryce (1999) and Brand (2007) suggest, if it was Urhi-Tesup that had sent the letter during his reign, then concerns over Assyrian threat seem less likely.

Whichever king had sent the letter however, the fact remains that there was no love lost between the two kingdoms. This might have been why a treaty with Egypt would have seemed more appealing to Hattusili III than with that of the Assyrian king. Adad-Nirari could also have been in a position to help secure his kingship, just as Ramesses II went on to do. Nonetheless, on evaluation of his position, seeking peace and ‘brotherhood’ with the king of Egypt may have been more enticing to the troubled king, Hattusili III, than losing face to the Assyrians.²¹ In addition to this point regarding Assyria, is the consideration of the likelihood of a treaty between Egypt and Assyria, as had happened during the reign of Tutankhamun. The possibility of this re-unification could have had a devastating effect to the Hittite position in Syria.²² Hattusili III may have contemplated this fact on entering into talks with Ramesses II.

Babylonia was another kingdom, one of equal status with that of Egypt, Hatti and Assyria, to which Hattusili III sought recognition from. During his reign, he was in contact

¹⁹ While preoccupied with the Battle of Kadesh, the Assyrian king had seen his chance and had seized the Hittite vassal state of Hanigalbat.

²⁰ Bryce (1999), p. 283.

²¹ Brand (2007), p. 30.

²² Morris (2005), pp. 374-375.

with the Babylonian king, Kadasman-Turgu, to offer treaty and seek help against Ramesses II, who, as mentioned above, was in possession of the usurped Urhi-Tesub. Unfortunately for Hattusili III however, the death of the Babylonian king shortly after the treaty was in place, was disregarded by his son, Kadasman-Enlil II. The young king restored Babylonia's diplomatic relationship with Egypt, possibly under the influence of his anti-Hittite vizier, Itti-Marduk-balatu.²³ Hattusili III would likely have been unable to push the situation under fear of angering Babylonia, and in doing so, fortify the Egyptian-Babylonian relationship further against Hatti.

The exiled Urhi-Tesup had sort contact with rival kingdoms of Babylonia and Assyria, in order to gain assistance against his uncle.²⁴ Hattusili III's underestimation of the determination with which Urhi-Tesup would use to regain the throne, had allowed his position to be placed under threat. Urhi-Tesup's plans to gain foreign support to his cause however, were discovered and halted, and a new place of exile was purposed by his uncle. Unfortunately for Hattusili III, his nephew escaped and as previously discussed, ended up in the Egyptian court of Ramesses II.²⁵ Hearing the pharaoh's refusal to return the usurped king would likely have been a huge blow to Hattusili III and his position as king. Fear of an attempt to regain the throne by Urhi-Tesup with Egyptian backing, which would have placed Hattusili III in a very vulnerable position, would therefore have been another valid reason for a seeking a treaty with the Egyptian king.²⁶

Despite rivalry between these four kingdoms, open war was highly unlikely to have been an intention of any of the 'Great Kings'. War of that size would have been long and costly with the likely chance of no eventual winner. Instead, to uphold the ideology of

²³ Bryce (1999), pp. 292-293.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 290.

²⁵ Bryce (2006), p. 5.

²⁶ Brand (2007), p. 23.

kingship, these rulers sought to impose authority by taking control of border territories.²⁷ The political structure of these vassal states meant that allegiances could interchange between rival countries, either through duress or allurements. Just as Hatti and Egypt fought over Kadesh and Amurru, the area of Mitanni and Hanigalbat, had long been fought over by both Hatti and Assyria.²⁸ By looking to the political history of these great kingdoms, it is easy to see why treaties were an important part in foreign relations. The acceptance of status as ‘Great King’ was vital to the progress and stability of a country.²⁹ Being classed as an equal would decrease the risk of border hostility, while countries of smaller status, would require the protection and assistance from their larger neighbours.

It seems to have been the politics within his own country that was behind Hattusili III’s need for a treaty. His military position over Syrian (lands such as Amurru and Kadesh) was strong, evidence of the power the Hittite’s held, and despite the loss of Hanigalbat, the Assyrians had not tried to advance further into Hittite territory. Likewise, the Babylonian King did also not pose any real threat to the stability of Hatti.³⁰ Indeed, Hattusili III’s main concern seems to have been the legitimacy of his reign, especially owing to the fact that both sons of Muwatalli were alive and could threaten his position. As Van de Mieroop (2010) suggests, Hattusili III’s need to write his ‘Apology’ could be an indication of his trying to convince some levels of Hittite society of his right to rule and to appease any local resistance. There is acknowledgement within his ‘Apology’ that he was openly opposed.³¹ He saw an opportunity then, to not only strengthen his rule, but also that of his successors.

In signing a treaty, Ramesses II had pledged himself to not only recognise Hattusili III and his successors as legitimate rulers, but also to aid them with military backing if required.

²⁷ Bryce (2006), pp. 1-2.

²⁸ Rowton (1959), p. 11.

²⁹ For foreign relations in the Ancient Near East see Moran (1992), Liverani (2001) and Cohen & Westbrook (2000).

³⁰ Spalinger (1981), p. 357.

³¹ Hoffner (1975), pp. 53-55.

Hattusili III had succeeded in eliminating the threat due to Urhi-Tesup residing in Egypt: the possible political threat he posed was far greater than any military threat from Egypt.³² So the long period of hostilities, which had existed since the latter half of the 14th century, had come to an end with the installation of a peace treaty, which was also later secured, by the marriage of Ramesses II with a daughter of Hattusili III.³³

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Written for *Introduction to ancient Egyptian history and civilisation (CLE-121)*

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³² Spalinger (1981), p. 357.

³³ Bryce (1999), p. 311.

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