

Forerunners of the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty

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1.

In 1259 BC, the 21st year of Ramesses II, a long period of hostility between Egypt and Hatti ended when the pharaoh concluded a treaty with the Hittite Great King Hattusili III. Hostilities had begun during the reign of the Hittite Great King Suppiluliuma I, some 80 years before, when this ruler conquered parts of Northern and Middle Syria and on this occasion came into conflict with Egypt which was ruled then by the pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty. Ongoing hostilities between both major powers are also attested during the reign of Suppiluliuma's successor, his son Mursili II. They reached their culmination in 1274 BC when Mursili's son and successor Muwatalli II, supported by a great number of vassal troops, fought the famous battle at Qadesh against the young pharaoh Ramesses II. That this battle ended with only moderate success for the Hittite side is clearly visible from succeeding campaigns of Ramesses in Central Syria. The situation did not improve until Hattusili III, a brother of the late Muwatalli, deposed the successor to the throne, his nephew Mursili III, and made himself Great King of Hatti. In order to stabilize his illegitimate reign, Hattusili was more interested in good relations with foreign powers of equal rank than his predecessors were. Besides the treaty with Egypt, which is the only preserved one, we know from diplomatic letters about the existence of treaties with Babylonia, Assyria, and the Mycenaean kingdom of Ahhijawah. At least two of them—the treaties with Egypt and Babylonia—deal with the mutual protection of the office of the ruler and the succession to the throne.¹

2.

The Hattusili-Ramesses treaty is known from two main sources. These are texts in Egyptian hieroglyphs preserved on the walls of the temple of Amun at Karnak and of the Ramesseum, and of some fragmentary cuneiform tablets in Akkadian, discovered at the Hittite capital of Hattusa, the modern site of Boghazköy in Central Anatolia. The relationship of these versions to one another can be reconstructed as follows: After agreement was reached on the terms of the treaty by negotiators of both states, two corresponding versions were inscribed in cuneiform and in Akkadian upon sealed tablets of silver. These documents were then exchanged. First the Hittite silver tablet was sent to Egypt. Afterwards the Egyptian document was brought to the Hittite capital. Thus it is the Hittite version which was secondarily translated into Egyptian and carved into the wall of the Egyptian temples, while the tablets found at the Hittite capital are copies of the Egyptian silver tablet.

2.1.

In both versions an earlier relationship between Hatti and Egypt and regulations for both countries—probably in written form—is mentioned.²

¹ cf. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 93. 133.

² The subsequent translations are from Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 90 ff, while paragraph divisions (§) are taken from Edel *Der Vertrag zwischen Ramses II. von Ägypten und Hattusili III. von Hatti*.

The extremely short historical retrospection of § 2 defines the relationship between past and prospective **rulers** of both countries in the following words:

‘As far as the relations of the Great King, King of Egypt, [and] the Great King, King of Hatti, are concerned, from the beginning of time and forever [by means of a treaty] the god does not allow the making of war between them’ (A obv. 9–11).

The relationship between the two **countries** in the past as well as in the future is defined in § 3, where the main objective of the treaty—brotherhood and peace—is formulated:

‘Ramesses, Beloved of Amun, Great King, King of Egypt, is doing this in order to bring about the relationship which [the Sun-god] and the Storm-god established for Egypt with Hatti in accordance with their relationship from the beginning of time, so that for eternity he might [not permit] the making of war between [them]... [And] we will create our brotherhood and our [peace], and they will be better than the former brotherhood and peace of [Egypt with] Hatti.’ (A obv. 11–21).

Obviously there was a relationship between Egypt and Hatti for a long time or, in the words of Ramesses, ‘from the beginning of time’, which is said to have been established by the [Sun-god] and the Storm-god; and that Ramesses will bring about this relationship again in order to prevent the making of war between them for eternity.

Old regulations, probably in written form, are subject of § 5 which deals with the renewal or revival of an older treaty:

‘The eternal regulation which the Sun-god and the Storm-god made for Egypt with Hatti is intended <to provide> peace and brotherhood and to prohibit hostilities between them. And [Ramesses], Beloved of Amun, Great King, King of Egypt, has taken it up in order to create peace from this day on. Egypt will be at peace and brotherly with Hatti forever.’ (A obv. 24–27).

It seems noteworthy that these regulations are also said to have been established in the past by the [Sun-god] and the Storm-god.

3.

Since the existence and renewal of a forerunner is attested in the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty itself beyond any doubt, the question arises whether evidence for this older treaty can be found elsewhere. As far as I know, Egyptian texts provide no information at all. Instead there are some reports of Hittite kings prior to Hattusili which throw a characteristic light on the question.

3.1

In his ‘Second Plague Prayer’,³ Mursili II, the father of Hattusili, mentions the rediscovery of two ancient (Hittite *karuila*) tablets, the latter one referring to people from the Northern Anatolian town of Kurustama:

‘And I found two [a]ncient tablets... The second tablet dealt with the town of Kurustama:

³ Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites*, No. 378

- how the Storm-god of Hatti carried the men of Kurustama to the land of Egypt;
- and how the Storm-god of Hatti made for them a treaty with the men of Hatti, so that they were put under oath by the Storm-god of Hatti.

Since the men of Hatti and the men of Egypt were bound by the oath of the Storm-god of Hatti, and the men of Hatti proceeded to get the upper hand, the men of Hatti thereby transgressed the oath of the gods at once (Hittite *hudak*). My father sent infantry and chariotry, and they attacked the borderland of Egypt, the land of Amqa. And again he sent, and again they attacked ... And when I found the aforementioned tablet about Egypt...'.⁴

The text refers to military activities of Mursili's father, Suppiluliuma I, which took place in Middle Syria and in the modern Biqa plain in Lebanon. On this occasion Suppiluliuma attacked Egyptian territory deliberately and unexpectedly (this is another meaning of Hittite *hudak*). This act was later on regarded by Mursili as the violation of a valid treaty with Egypt.

Violations of borderlines between Egypt and Hatti seem also to be the topic of another text from the times of Mursili,⁵ which was recently classified by Itamar Singer as 'another fragmentary plague prayer' of Mursili, although in my opinion that it is a purification oath of the Hittite king is still more likely:⁶

'[It was a tablet (?) about] Egypt. // To this tablet I did not add any word nor did I remove [any]. ... I do not know whether any of those who were kings before me added [any word] to it or removed any ... // I did not concern myself with those borders which were set for us by the Storm-god. Those borders that my father left me, those borders [I kept]. I did [not] desire from him [anything]. Neither [did I take anything (?)] from his borderland'.⁷

The phrase 'those borders which were set for us by the Storm-god' seems to correspond with the statement of the 'Second Plague Prayer', that 'the men of Hatti and the men of Egypt were bound by the oath of the Storm-god of Hatti'. What must, however, be separated from Mursili's report on conflicts between Hatti and Egypt is his mention of the resettlement of people from the Northern Anatolian town of Kurustama to Egypt (see below).

3.2

The same events are described in a wider context in the posthumous edition of the annalistic 'Deeds' of Hattusili's grandfather Suppiluliuma:⁸

'And when they attacked Amka, which is your country, you probably were afraid; and (therefore) you keep asking me for a son of mine (as if it were my) duty (Hittite *pidda*)'.⁹

Here Suppiluliuma refers to the letter of the widow of a deceased Egyptian pharaoh, whose identity

⁴ Modified translation after Singer, 'The Kurustama Treaty Revisited', 595.

⁵ Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites*, No. 379.

⁶ cf Sürenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge aus hethitischer Sicht*, 106 ff.

⁷ Singer, 'The Kurustama Treaty Revisited', 596.

⁸ Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites*, No. 40, fragm. E3 IV.

⁹ Güterbock, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 10 (1956), 97.

(Akhenaten or Tutankhamun) is still controversial. In this letter the demand for a Hittite heir to the Egyptian throne was formulated in a way which made a refusal as good as impossible. This becomes obvious from the use of the Hittite word *pidda*. Against Güterbock's translation, its true meaning is with all probability 'legal claim'.¹⁰ This is why Suppiluliuma:

'concerned himself on their behalf with the matter of a son again (Hittite *namma*). Then (Hittite *namma*) my father asked for the tablet of the treaty (in which it was told):

- how formerly the Storm-god took the man of Kurustama, a Hittite (lit.: a son of Hatti) and carried him to the land of Egypt, and made them Egyptians (lit.: men of Egypt);
- and how the Storm-god concluded a treaty between the lands of Egypt and Hatti,
- and how they were continuously friendly with each other;
- and how they had read about the tablet before them.

Then my father addressed them as following: 'Of old, Hatti (lit.: Hattusa) and Egypt were friendly with each other, and now, this too has taken place between us. Henceforth Hatti and Egypt will continuously be friendly with each other'.¹¹

Here we find the Kurustama people again, but this time they are obviously not subject of the treaty but just embedded in a historical retrospection. Because of that their resettlement must have taken place before a treaty between Hatti and Egypt was concluded in the name of the Storm-god.

3.3

The existence of a treaty with Egypt during the times of Suppiluliuma may therefore be taken for granted. Apart from provisions still unknown to us, it must have contained the following statements and clauses:

— A preamble which is to be expected at the beginning. It must have contained the mention of the Storm-god in whose name this treaty was concluded. This was probably followed by the mention of the people—and probably not the rulers—of Hatti and Egypt, who were the addressees of this agreement. This is not only attested in the texts of Mursili and Suppiluliuma, but it is also in accordance with §§ 2 and 5 of the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty where 'the God', in other words, the Sun-god and the Storm-god, is said to have established the former agreement between both countries.

— The preamble was followed by a historical retrospection in which the resettlement of the Kurustama people is described and taken as a positive argument with regard to the conclusion of a treaty between Hatti and Egypt.

— Next came a clause of central importance, by which both addressees were obligated to be continuously friendly with each other. This obligation corresponds well with § 3 of the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty which deals with brotherhood and peace 'for eternity' as the main objective of the treaty. And like the preamble it makes also clear that the older treaty was already an agreement among equals.

— These three sections were followed by individual regulations which, among other things, fixed the borders between both countries, and guaranteed the integrity of the office of ruler and of royal succession for both sides. Without a clause of the last-mentioned kind, the demand of the Egyptian side

¹⁰ Sürenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge aus hethitischer Sicht*, 58 ff.

¹¹ Modified translation after Singer, 'The Kurustama Treaty Revisited', 594.

for a Hittite heir to their throne would have stood without legitimacy. It should be remarked that a dynastic guarantee clause (§ 10) is also part of the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty, being the only paragraph here which is formulated in an unilateral way:

‘And the son of Hattusili, King of Hatti, shall be made King of Hatti in place of Hattusili, his father, after the many years of Hattusili [King] of Hatti. And if [the people] of Hatti commit an offense against him, then [Ramesses], Beloved of Amon, must send [infantry] and chariotry to take revenge on them.’ (A obv. 40–43).¹²

— From the final provisions only the pronouncement of the text is attested, but it must be taken in consideration that this was an act of outstanding importance which required the oath of the addressees and the obligatory deposit of the tablets in advance.

4.

The question remains how old this treaty was and what might have been preserved from it other than its quotation in later texts. Against this background, the so-called ‘Kurustama treaty’¹³ which has survived in a series of altogether 5 poorly preserved copies should be taken in consideration. Because of its archaic language, the missing original version was certainly written down during the times of the Middle Hittite kingdom, several generations before the reign of Suppiluliuma I.

4.1

These fragments were most recently re-studied by Itamar Singer.¹⁴ Due to his meticulous study a much better understanding of the content and the genre of the text has now become possible.

Before, several scholars had regarded this text to be in fact the old treaty between Hatti and Egypt¹⁵ which was cited and re-acknowledged by Suppiluliuma in his ‘Deeds’ and mentioned again by his son Mursili II in the ‘Second Plague Prayer’ where it is labelled both a ‘tablet of the town of Kurustama’ and a ‘tablet about Egypt’. As quoted above, the latter designation was also used by Mursili in his purification oath.¹⁶

In a different view¹⁷ the ‘Kurustama treaty’ was regarded more as some sort of a ‘release treaty’ for the men of Kurustama, before they left their homeland and went to Egypt. And with regard to later sources, parallels with the first two entries in the ‘Second Plague Prayer’ were taken for granted, because they also deal exclusively with the people of Kurustama. Thus the actual ‘Kurustama treaty’ was separated from an old agreement between Hatti and Egypt which was repeatedly mentioned until the times of the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty.

4.2

Now, according to Singer’s new restorations of the text, an even more complex interpretation seems possible.¹⁸

¹² Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 93

¹³ Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites*, No. 134.

¹⁴ Singer, ‘The Kurustama Treaty Revisited’.

¹⁵ cf. Sürenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge aus hethitischer Sicht*, 29; Singer, ‘The Kurustama Treaty Revisited’, 602.

¹⁶ Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites*, No. 379.

¹⁷ Sürenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge aus hethitischer Sicht*, 29 ff.

¹⁸ Subsequent translations from Singer, ‘The Kurustama Treaty Revisited’, 601 ff.

No doubt regulations are set forth here which are not made for the people of Kurustama. Instead they refer to the people of Hatti and Egypt likewise:

‘(5’) The men of H[atti], you should not go into (6’) the land of E[gypt] with [ev]il intentions (lit.: ‘word/thing’), [and the men of Egypt (7’) should not go(?)] [t]o the land of Hatti [with(?)] evil. (8’) [The land of H]attusa [should] be allies to the land of Egypt (9’) and you should defend Egypt! Egypt should be allies (10’) [to Hattusa and you should defend Hattusa!].’

These are mutual regulations for partners of equal status which can be found in parity treaties only, such as the later Hattusili-Ramesses treaty. The name of the person or institution who made this agreement for both sides is not preserved, but taking the ‘Deeds’ of Suppiluliuma and Mursili’s ‘Second Plague Prayer’ in consideration, it can be taken for granted that this was neither the Great King of Hatti nor was it the Egyptian Pharaoh. The agreement was, with all probability, concluded in the name of the Storm-god of Hatti.

It must be noted that regulations of this kind can be found exclusively on the reverse of the fragmentary tablets in question, while in all known cases the content of the obverse looks quite different. Instead of mutual regulations for partners of equal status we find several obligations at the beginning which were probably spoken aloud by a group of people:

‘(2’) Our heart tremble[s (or: tremble[d (3’) and [we will (?)] not def[end(?)] any more.
(4’) Let us not see any [more] (5’) let us not hea[r any more...].’

These obligations are followed by instructions which probably apply to the same group:

(6’) [Be(?)] very conce[rned...] (7’) Behold, for/to you (*plural*) the Sto[rm?-god...] (A obv. (4’)) the sea (*accusative*) [.....] // (5’) fea[r (or: respec[t *accusative?* (Hittite *kar-tim-mi-ja-at-t[a-an(?)])... (6’) you (*plural*) should not see any m[ore...].’*

Finally, in l. 7’, ‘the sons of Kurustama’ are mentioned. Since obligations and instructions are addressed to one group of people only, they should explicitly refer to the people of the town of Kurustama, and not to the people of Hatti and Egypt, what is obviously the case with the regulations on the reverse of the tablets. The same observation can be made in the event of the isolated fragment Bo 3508:

// (2’) You (*plural*) should [not] in[trude(?) to H]atti [...] (3’) [the words(?)] [of(?)] the St[orm-god...] (4’) [you should] not vio[late...] (5’) [...] of the Storm-god [...] (6’) [...] not [...] (7’) [...] the sons of Kurus[tama...] (8’) [...should] b[e sons of(?)] Egypt [...] //

If these conclusions are correct, the existence of two different documents on one and the same tablet must be taken in consideration. The first one, which is in all cases written on the reverse of the tablets, may then be identified with the old treaty between Hatti and Egypt. The other one, which is always to be found on the obverse, looks rather like a dialogue between a person or institution which gives a group of people instructions to be accepted or even repeated by the latter. If the people of Kurustama are meant, as is supposed here, the instructions were formulated in the name of the Storm-god, and were then laid under oath. In this case the first two entries in Mursili’s ‘Second Plague Prayer’ should refer to this accord, which was solely made for the Kurustama people.

4.3

Nevertheless the nature of the Kurustama accord does remain a little obscure. Its definition depends on the status of the Kurustama people at the time of their swearing-in. In other words: were they still regarded as Hittite subjects, or not? In the first case a simple instruction form would be sufficient, while in the latter case a sort of agreement should be visible which matches to some degree the form of Hittite vassal treaties. From what is preserved from the text, both seem possible.

For negative obligations of a vassal, the treaty between the king of Mitanni Sattiwaza and Suppiluliuma I provides a good example:

‘If I, Sattiwaza, and the Hurrians do not observe the words of this treaty and of the oath, ... let me, Sattiwaza, ... and us Hurrians ... like the fir tree have no progeny. ... let us, like the water of a drainpipe not return to our place. ... let me, Sattiwaza, ... and the Hurrians ... like salt have no progeny. Like a (dissolved) lump of salt let us not return to our place’.¹⁹

But the same kind of self-condemnation can also be found in instructions for the Hittite military from the Middle Hittite Period:

(1 17’) ‘[As long as this (man)] (1 8’) [wa]s enjoying his life, he could see the sky above, (1 9’) and, behold, they have now blinded him (2 0’) at the place of the oath — (2 1’) whoever transgres[s]es these oaths, (2 2’) betr[ays] the king of the Hatti land, (2 3’) and turns his eyes in hostile fashion upon the Hatti land (2 4’) let these oaths seize him! (2 5’) Let them blind this man’s army (2 6’) and make them deaf! Let them (2 7’) not see ea[ch] other, let them (2 8’) not hear each [other]’ (4 6) The men declare: ‘So be it!’.²⁰

Here almost the same phrases are used as in the Kurustama accord, where the hitherto obscure meaning of ‘let us not see any more’ and ‘let us not hear any more / you (*plural*) should not see any m[ore...].’ now find a reasonable explanation.

4.4

While the date of both agreements still needs resolution, it seems most likely that the Kurustama accord was concluded prior to the Hittite-Egyptian treaty, because in the latter one the event served as a positive argument and thus became a prominent part of the historical retrospect. This becomes also obvious from the order in which Suppiluliuma referred to the clauses of the old treaty. Possibly the span of time between both agreements was rather short. Nevertheless, a precise date for them is still to be found, and it should be located in the Middle Hittite Period. At present Itamar Singer²¹ looks most convincing when he argues that ‘An early accord between Hatti and Egypt would best be set in a period when Hittite hegemony extended deep into Syria and could have clashed with Egyptians interests in the area’. He further demonstrates that this was the case during the reign of Tuthalija I, ‘who ... concluded vassal treaties with (the Northern Syrian kingdoms of) Halap, Tunip and Astata’. On the other hand no synchronism with Egypt from this time exists. But as Singer observes, during this period two

¹⁹ Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 93 49.

²⁰ Translation after A.Goetze, in: Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 353; Oettinger, *Die militärischen Eide der Hethiter*, 7.

²¹ Singer, ‘The Kurustama Treaty Revisited’, 604 ff.

Pharaohs—Thutmose III and Amenhotep II—were in contact with the Hittites. His arguments in favour of the latter one, Amenhotep II, deserve attention.

Regardless of many differences in detail both texts have one topic in common, the relations between Hittites and Egyptians. This might explain why they were written down together on one tablet. This concept becomes visible again in the case of a Hittite tablet which deals with the town of Zalpa at the Black Sea coast. Here the text begins with a mythological tale from prehistoric times and continues with historical events from the times of the Old Hittite Empire.²²

Against this background the two different designations for one and the same tablet—‘tablet of the town of Kurustama’ and ‘tablet about Egypt’—, which were used by Mursili in his ‘Second Plague Prayer’, seem better understandable if we assume that he had in mind one of those tablets which contain the Kurustama accord as well as the old, and up to now earliest, treaty between Hatti and Egypt. The question may be asked, however, whether at that time the original documents of the Kurustama accord and the old Hittite-Egyptian treaty were still available to the Hittite chancellery.

5.

Two clauses of the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty, the historical retrospect and the clause concerning the renewal of an existing agreement, have already shown that only one treaty prior to it had existed. This was a parity treaty, which was possibly concluded during the reign of the Middle Hittite king Tuthalija I, three generations before Suppiluliuma I. It was preceded by the resettlement of the Kurustama people to Egypt. As demonstrated above (3.3), the structure and contents of this older treaty can partially be reconstructed.

None of the textual sources discussed here speaks in favour of neither the renewal nor the cancelling of the older treaty at any given time prior to the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty. From Suppiluliuma we just know that the treaty he had violated was acknowledged by him again. Obviously this did not prevent him from further military campaigns against Egypt. Mursili felt responsible for violations caused by his father but never took the conclusion of a new treaty with Egypt into account. Muwatalli’s answer to the question was the battle at Qadesh.

It was only in the time of Hattusili III and Ramesses II that a serious interest in peaceful mutual relations becomes visible. This led to an updated version in written form of the existent treaty. The partly renewed version of the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty resembles Hittite vassal treaties were older versions were cited in a modified way. The most prominent example for this practise is the appanage treaty concluded by the Hittite Great King Tuthalija IV. and his cousin Kurunta on a bronze tablet.²³ In all those cases former treaties remained legally valid and this should also apply to the Hattusili-Ramesses treaty and its forerunner.

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²² Otten, *Eine althethitische Erzählung um die Stadt Zalpa*.

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