

# Communication between the Gods and the Hittite King

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## 1. Introduction

In the kingdom of the Hittites, which flourished in central Anatolia in the second millennium B.C., the king was thought to be the mediator between the divine world and the state he dominated. Taggar-Cohen (2014: 13) defines the role of the Hittite king as follows: “According to Hittite legal thought the gods chose the king as their deputy, to rule their land. He was judged by the way in which he fulfilled his service to the gods. A Hittite king would term himself as the god’s priest – in Hittite SANGA or *šankunni-* and would be sure to take part in all the important festivals in the temples of the holy cities in the vicinity of the capital Ḫattuša.” The Hittite king ruled the kingdom on behalf of the gods, and was responsible for leading his people.

The king was a mediator and made known the gods’ demands through a document. The king’s role as such can be deduced from the usages of the Hittite noun *išhiul-*. This noun means a legal document by which the king imposed obligations upon his subjects, usually translated as instructions for state officials or a treaty with a foreign ruler.<sup>1)</sup>

Originally, *išhiul-* was the abstract noun derived from the verb *išhai-/išhiya-*, which figuratively means, “to impose a burden upon someone.”<sup>2)</sup> It denotes a tight and forceful bond to a burden, as if the person it was imposed on felt it impossible to escape from it of his own will. Accordingly, we can assume the meaning of *išhiul-* as “something that imposes a burden on a person,” which implies the vertical relationship between the imposer and the person(s) imposed upon.<sup>3)</sup> Therefore, the vertical relationship this noun represents can be not only the relation between the Hittite king and his people, but also the relation between the gods and the people.<sup>4)</sup>

Some usages of this noun show that its primary meaning is “the law of the gods”, that is the gods’ order that rules their worship. This meaning is seen in a prayer of the Hittite queen Puduḫepa.

KUB<sup>3)</sup> 21.27 ii 3-4 (CTH<sup>9)</sup>384=Prayer of Puduḫepa to the Sungoddess of Arinna)

(3) *nu-un-na-aš-kán šu-me-el ŠA DINGIR<sup>MES</sup> iš-ḫi-ú-ul* (4) [*ha-az-z*]i-wi *QA-TAM-MA kat-ta a-ú-um-me-ni*

“And we will observe your, the gods’ law and [ritual] likewise.”<sup>7)</sup>

In order to impose the law of the gods, the king as mediator had to instruct the people of the gods’

demands. We can suppose that he issued the texts titled *išhiul-* in which he stipulated the obligations of the people based on divine demand. An *išhiul-* text was, therefore, a means of mediation for the king to administer his kingdom.

If this interpretation is correct, the next question is: how did the Hittite king “receive” the original *išhiul-*, or the law of the gods? We are unable as yet to fully understand the whole process by which the Hittite king communicated with the gods. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to present the ways by which the gods and the king communicated. For the sake of clarification, this paper will mainly deal with the expressions and the contexts found in the Hittite prayers and oracle texts, especially where the noun *išhiul-* occurs.

Based on the usages of this noun, there were at least two ways for the Hittite king to “receive” the law of the gods: through a dream or through an oracle. On the one hand, according to narratives by the Hittite kings, the gods sometimes appeared in the king’s dream and told him what he should do. On the other hand, oracles were also consulted in order to understand the divine will, such as why the gods’ anger had caused a natural disaster or the king’s illness.

## 2. Communication through Dreams

As mentioned above, the gods were thought to be continually establishing *išhiul-* their law. At the beginning of the text known as “Prayer of a King to the Sun god” (CTH 374), the Hittite king invokes the Sun god asking him to transfer his plea to his own personal god.

KUB 31.130 obv. 1’-3’ (CTH374.I=The Prayer of the King to the Sungod)

(1’) [ʷUTU-*e šar-ku* LUGAL-*u-e*] ʷDUMU ʷNIN.GAL [iš-*h*]i-*ʷu-uh* š[a-*ak-l*]a-*in* / (2’) [zi-*ik-pát* ʷUTU-*uš ḫa-an-t*]e-*eš-ki-ši na-aš-ta* KUR-*ʷya* iš-*tar-na* / (3’) [zi-*ik-pát aš-ša-nu*]-*wa-an-za* ʷUTU-*uš <ḫa-an-da-an-za>*(?) DINGIR-*uš zi-ik*

“[O Sun-god, mighty king], son of Nikkal, [you alone, O Sun-g]od, are [establi]shing the [I]aw (and) the c[us]tom, and in the land [you alone] are [widely wor]shipped, you are the <just> god, O Sun-god!”<sup>8)</sup>

Here the Hittite king addresses the Sun god as the one who is establishing *išhiul-* “the law” and *šaklai-*, “the custom”.<sup>9)</sup> According to the following context where the detailed procedures of the ritual for the god are mentioned, we can suppose that the *išhiul-* is the principle rule that determines how human beings should treat the gods. Its coordinated noun *šaklai-* seems to mean the custom for worshipping them based on the law of *išhiul-*.

In another prayer, the Hittite king asks the gods to tell him of their demands through a dream. The text known as “Second Plague Prayer of Muršili II” (CTH 378) preserves such a request.

KUB 14.8 rev.34’-36’ (CTH 378.II.A=The Second Plague Prayer of Muršili II) (34’) *na-aš-ma-kán ma-a-an* (35’) [*am-m*]u-uk-ma ku-it-ki šar-ni-ik-ze-el ḫa-an-ti iš-ḫi-ya-at-te-e-ni (36’) [*na-a*]t-mu te-eš-ḫa-az me-mi-eš-ten nu-uš-ma-ša-at pí-iḫ-ḫi

“Or if however, you (the gods) separately impose some kind of compensation on [m]e, tell it to me in a dream and I will give it to you.”<sup>10)</sup>

The king understood that the plague spread over the country had been caused by the god’s anger at his father’s neglect of offerings to the Euphrates River and the violation of the treaty with Egypt which he had formerly concluded. Muršili asked the Storm god what he, as the son of his father, needed to do to compensate and asked the god to tell him through a dream. The verb *išḫiyatteni* in line 35’ occurs in the second person plural form of *išḫai-/išḫiya-*. Because compensation – *šarnikzel*<sup>11)</sup>— is the obligation the gods imposed upon the king, it can be described as a part of the law of the gods, or a part of the *išḫiul-*. The Hittite king thought that a dream was one of the methods through which the gods transferred their demands.

The gods also appeared in dreams voluntarily. They made an appearance when they wanted to communicate their demands to the people. In the “Apology of Ḫattušili” (CTH 81), the king twice mentions that his personal goddess Ištar appeared in his dream.<sup>12)</sup>

KUB 1.1+ i 35-42 (CTH81.A=Apology of Ḫattušili)

“My brother, Muw[at]alli summoned me “to the deity (of the process)”. But Ištar, My Lady, appeared to me in a dream, and through the dream she said this to me: “To the deity (of the process)” I will leave you, so do not fear!” and through the deity I was acquitted. Since the goddess, My Lady, held me by the hand, she never exposed me to an evil deity (nor) to an evil lawsuit, never did she let an enemy weapon sway over me: Ištar, My Lady, took me to her in every respect.”<sup>13)</sup>

When Ḫattušili, the later Hittite king, was appointed as the governor of the Upper Land by his brother and the current king Muwatalli, his political enemies tried to remove him from office with the help of black magic. The king Muwatalli investigated this matter through “to the deity (of the process)”, which is divine trial, and which finally turned out favorable to Ḫattušili. The example cited explains that his personal goddess Ištar informed Ḫattušili that she would side with him and promised a favorable result of the trial.

The goddess also appeared in his dream when he married Puduḫepa, a daughter of the priest named Pentipšarri in Kizzuwatna, to tell him to make his whole family become her servants.

KUB 1.1+ iii 1-8 (CTH81.A=Apology of Ḫattušili)

“[A]t the behest of the goddess I took Puduḫepa, the daughter of Pentipsarri, the priest, for my wife: we joined (in matrimony) [and] the goddess gave [u]s the love of husband (and) w[i]fe. We made ourselves sons (and) daughters. Then the goddess, My Lady, appeared to me in a dream (saying): “Become my servant [with] (your) household!” so the goddess’ [serv]ant with my household I became. In the house which we made ourselves, the goddess was there with us and our house thrived: that was the recognition of Ištar, My Lady.”<sup>14)</sup>

As seen in these examples, whether the king “receives” the divine words from his dream depends on the gods’ will. All the gods’ words can be described as *išḫiul-* imposed upon the king, which he had to observe. Observing the law of the gods would ensure prosperity for the king and his kingdom. Even though these always concerned the king’s personal matters in the first place, his wellbeing was thought to influence the whole land because he embodied it. If needed, he might instruct his people on how they were supposed to worship the gods. For example, Ḫattušili, as the servant of Ištar, must have been responsible for instructing the priests how his personal goddess should be treated. As Taggar-Cohen (2014:11) already pointed out, the king issued instruction texts as the king’s law for maintaining the god’s worship, and in order to avoid sinning against the gods’ will, the priests thus instructed worked directly under divine rule and judgment.

### **3. Communication through Oracular Inquiry**

Another means of communication between the gods and humanity was oracle inquiry. Frantz-Szabó (2015) summarizes that “oracular inquiries were carried out to determine the course of a military campaign, the routes of march, and the winter quarters of the army; the possible outbreak of plague in the military camp; evil phenomena to be expected upon an accession to the throne; and very often concerning illnesses of the king and the royal couple.” Therefore, oracles were consulted to obtain answers from the gods concerning matters that could affect the whole land. This suggests that it was the king who initiated these oracular inquiries.

The Hittites used various types of oracles such as the lot-oracle, extispicy and augury.<sup>15)</sup> A diviner interpreted the results of inquires as simple answers, either a favorable “yes” or unfavorable “no”. A text preserving results of a liver-oracle shows the process in which the diviner ascertained the cause

of the divine anger and then determined the appropriate way of celebrating the god.

KUB 5.6+KUB 18.54 i 20'-26' (CTH570=liver oracle (SU))

(20') A-NA DINGIR<sup>LUM</sup> ku-it iš-ḫi-ú-ul ŠA LÚ<sup>URU</sup> Aš-ta-ta i-wa-ar SixSÁ-at (21') nu LÚ<sup>URU</sup> Aš-ta-ta ku-iš 1 EZEN ḫar-pí-ya-aš 1 EZEN ŠA ITI.10. †KAM† IQ-BI (22') na-at IŠ-TU TUP-PI ma-aḫ-ḫa-an a-ni-ya-an-te-eš na-aš QA-TAM-MA (23') e-eš-šu-wa-an ti-i-ya-an-zi ŠA †Mi-iz-zu-ul-la-ya i-wa-ar ku-it (24') iš-ḫi-ú-ul ke-e-da-aš A-NA SISKUR<sup>HIA</sup> an-da SixSÁ-at nu-kán ma-a-an DINGIR<sup>LUM</sup> (25') EZEN a-ya-a-ri ke-e-da-aš A-NA EZEN<sup>HIA</sup> ŠA †Mi-iz-zu-ul-la (26') i-wa-ar an-da ša-an-aḫ-ta nu SixSÁ-at

“Because *išḫiul* in the style of the man of Aštata was established by oracle, and the man of Aštata mentioned one harvest festival (lit. ‘of the grain pile’) and one festival in the tenth month, they will begin to celebrate them as they are set down on the tablet. Because *išḫiul* in the style of Mezzulla was (also) established for these festivals, whether you, O deity, among these festivals desired an *ayari*-festival in the style of Mezzulla was established by oracle.”<sup>16)</sup>

Performing these liver-oracles, the diviner tried to determine which god had caused the illness of the king and which festival he demanded.<sup>17)</sup> According to the result of an oracle inquiry, the diviner ascertained that the *išḫiul*- in the style of “man of Aštata” was appropriate for the harvest festival and the festival in the tenth month. In addition, another oracle established the *išḫiul* in the style of a female diviner named Mezzulla meaning that a certain *ayari*-festival in her style was also demanded for these festivals.<sup>18)</sup> The *išḫiul*- occurring in this text seems to be traditionally performed local procedures for festivals, which had been already ascertained and established by oracle inquiries before. The gods, through oracles, informed people which festivals they should celebrate and how they should perform them. Thus, oracles let people know the divine *išḫiul*- through a yes or no answer. They were to be initiated by the Hittite king whose duty was to celebrate the gods appropriately as their principal priest.

For humans, oracles were the only means of asking the gods, on their own initiative, what they exactly needed to know. Because the issues of the inquiries mostly affected the whole land, it must have been the king who ordered diviners to ascertain the divine will. However, after the result became known, the king had the right to establish and stipulate concrete procedures of worship of the gods by the people through an official document. This is well illustrated by a festival text, KBo 2.4 rev. iv 27'-28' (CTH672.D=Monthly festival of Nerik)

(27') INIM Ta-ba-ar-na LUGAL.GAL ki-i-kán (28') iš-ḫi-ú-ul le-e ku-iš-ki wa-aḫ-nu-zi

“The word of the Tabarna, the great king, this *išḫiul* no one shall change!”<sup>19)</sup>

The king determined the procedures of the festival addressing the priests in the temple at the holy city of Nerik. Now, the meaning of *išhiul-* evolved to literally “the king’s words” – INIM *Tabarna*<sup>20</sup> – from its original meaning of the law of the gods. If the words were written down on a tablet, the text was called an instruction document by the king, who had to make sure that his words would not be changed in order not to go against the divine will.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Looking at the usages of the noun *išhiul-* in prayers and ritual texts, we can assume that the Hittite king could receive the law of the gods either through dreams or oracles. Receiving a message directly from the gods or having diviners interpret omens, he could know what the gods wanted him to do. He obeyed the law and imposed the obligations according to the law upon his subjects.

The discussions above can be summarized into the following four points. Firstly, through a dream, the gods informed the king of his personal matters such as compensation due and his servitude to them. The gods were not only asked to appear in his dream, but they also appeared voluntarily when they wanted to tell him something. Secondly, oracular inquiries were initiated by the king and performed and interpreted by a diviner in order to know what the gods demanded regarding national affairs. Thirdly, we can describe dreams as being the means of communication from the gods while oracles were the means of communication requested by the king. Finally, after communication was established by either way, the king, as the highest priest, issued instruction texts titled *išhiul-* to the people when he thought them needed. An *išhiul-* text might also have been intended to show and inform the gods that the king behaved correctly according to their will.

This paper aimed at showing the general picture of communication between the gods and the Hittite king. It is necessary, however, to take a closer look at the contents of the divine messages both through dreams and oracles. In order to comprehend the concrete process of the communication, we need to understand what the gods told the king to do and how the king tried to know the gods’ will.

In any case, the communications between the gods and the Hittite king discussed in this paper might also give rise to suggestions for further biblical study. Tagger-Cohen (2014: 13) suggested “while the gods in the Hittite case and YHWH in the biblical case are the *de facto* rulers, there is in both cases a mediator: the Hittite king and the leader Moses, or in other biblical cases Joshua, Gideon, Judges and the kings.” Even if there may not be direct correlation, the ways of communication between the gods and the Hittite king and between God and the leaders in the biblical world could be conceptually connected.

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## Notes

- 1) Puhvel’s translation (1984: 400): “binding; obligation, injunction; statute; treaty.” Kloekhorst follows his translation (2008: 392).
- 2) Puhvel (1984: 398) translates this verb as “bind, wrap; obligate with; impose upon,” and Kloekhorst (2008: 391) follows his translation.
- 3) As for the usages of the verb *išḫai-/iṣḫiya*- and its meaning, see Yamamoto (2015).
- 4) See Taggar-Cohen (2011: 482).

- 5) Most of the Hittite texts from Hattuša, the capital of the kingdom, have been published in the series KBo=*Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy*, Berlin or KUB=*Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy*, Berlin.
- 6) CTH=Laroche, E. *Catalogue des textes hittites*, 1971, Paris. This project of categorization has been continued to be updated by S. Košak and G.G.W. Müller.
- 7) According to the transliteration of Sürenhagen (1981: 108-122) and the translation of Singer (2002: 103).
- 8) According to the transliteration and translation of Schwemer (2011: 16-17; 24).
- 9) See CHD (*The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Chicago, 1980ff.) (Š: 44).
- 10) According to the transliteration of Lebrun (1980: 209) and translation of van den Hout (2006: 265).
- 11) See CHD (Š: 279-281).
- 12) In this text, Ḫattušili narrated that Ištar also showed up once in a dream of his wife and queen Puduḫepa and once in those of the generals. See Mouton (2007: 88-91). The gods were thought to appear not only in the king's dream but also in dreams of people to whom they wanted to tell something.
- 13) According to the translation of van den Hout (2003: 202).
- 14) According to the translation of van den Hout (2003: 202).
- 15) For a general description of each type of oracle, see Frantz-Szabó (2015).
- 16) According to the transliteration of Beckman et al. (2011: 184-185). While they translate *išhiul* here as "regimen," it is misleading because it only suggests a set of rules for improving the king's health. The translation of the word remains *išhul* in order to regard it as god's will for the whole process of the festivals. The sign in the end of line 20' should be S1xSÁ-at instead of SIG<sub>5</sub>-at that appears in the transliteration of Beckman et al. This transliteration must be a simple typo because they translated here correctly as "established (S1xSÁ-at)," not "favorable (SIG<sub>5</sub>-at)".
- 17) Beckman et. al (2011: 185) suggested that the angry god mentioned in this text was Išhara, the goddess of oath.
- 18) Puhvel (1991: 304) mentions, "*hiyara-* is a hittitized form of the month name *hiyari* in Hurrian territory (Alalah, Nuzi, Ugarit), which in turn matches Akkadian *ayari* (second month, April – May)." Hutter (2002) argues that the *hiyara*-festival was originated from North Syria, which was the festival for the Storm god in Aleppo. It was not only for worshipers of the god in Ḫattuša but also people from Aleppo living there. As one of the state festivals, it was celebrated as a royal prerogative (Taggar-Cohen 2006: 120).
- 19) According to the transliteration and the translation of Taggar-Cohen (2006: 227).
- 20) *Tabarna* or *Labarna* was the title of Hittite kings.