

Hittite – one language with many languages

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Introduction

While researching on Hittite *i*-stems, the high number of foreign words among them became evident. For instance, there are *Kultur- und Wanderwörter* (areal culture words) from either Egyptian, Hurrian or Akkadian origin. Furthermore, Hurrian or Hattic loanwords can be found. And there are also Luwian words and formations with Luwian suffixes on Hittite bases. Determining the origin of these words is a highly controversial procedure as dictionary entries show. For many of the lexemes we still don't have any convincing explication or etymology. Given this panorama, a lot of questions emerge (see § Questions to answer). The following examples were chosen in order to represent the variety of words respecting their language provenance, each showing a different challenge or problem:

DUG **aganni-** (genus commune)
,bowl'

- Egypt. ʾikn (vessel) > (Western) Akk. *agan(n)u*, Ugar. *agn*, Hebr. *aggān*, Hitt. (via Hurr.) DUG *aganni-*
- loanword or terminus technicus < Hurr. (or via Hurr.) in the C13th thus uninflected *a-ga-an-ni* KUB XXVII 13 I 21
- word originally **Egypt., Hurr. or Akk.?**

(data from EHS, 245 §138; HED/1, 24; HEG/1, 10; HW²/1, 52)

(SÍG) **ali-** (genus commune)
(certain wool and its threads)

- only in **Hurr.**-Hitt. rituals, only NH
- probably of foreign origin, presumably Hurr.; possibly a „Mediterranean“ term for ,wool‘, from a root meaning ,wind, roll‘, seen perhaps in Gk. ἄλιπδέω, much as Hitt. *hulana-*, *hulija-* ,wool‘, root-related with *hulaliija-* ,wind, wrap‘
- possible relation to Hurr. *ale/i-* ,weaver‘ ??

(data from HED/1, 34; HEG/1, 16; HW²/1, 58)

Hittite

alhari- (genus commune)
(stone)

- hapax in a **Hatt.**-Hitt. bilingual
- probably of protohatt./pre-PIE-anat. origin

(data from HEG/1, 16)

NINDA **allinašši-** (genus commune)
(type of bread or biscuit)

- only NH; probably of foreign origin, poss. via Luw.
- probably derived from some proper name with **Luw. suffix -ašši-**

(data from HED/1, 35; HEG/1, 17; HW²/1, 59)

In Trevor Bryce, *Life and Society in the Hittite World*, Oxford, 2004, 252 the daily situation of Hattusa is described as follows:

“The official language of the kingdom was an Indo-European language called Nesite, which we commonly refer to today as the ‘Hittite’ language. [...] Throughout their history, however, the Hittites absorbed **many other ethnic and cultural elements** within the fabric of their civilization [...] (p. 8)

A veritable babel of languages must have echoed through the thoroughfares and byways of Hattusa - royal bureaucrats speaking the **official Nesite language**, Luwian-speaking descendants of booty people brought back to the homeland from Hittite campaigns in the west, **Akkadian**-speaking scribes and emissaries from the Babylonian king, merchants and representatives of vassal rulers from the Syrian states speaking a range of languages, **Hurrian**-speaking priests and diviners in the service of the city's many temples, **Egyptian**-speaking envoys and their retinues on business from the pharaoh and awaiting an audience with the Hittite king. Even a few persistent echoes of the old **Hattic** language might also have been heard.”

But it is necessary to take into consideration the “Indo-Europeaness” of the Hittite language as was said by Calvert Watkins, Hittite (Chapter 2), in: Roger D. Woodard (Ed.) - *The Ancient Languages of Asia Minor*, Cambridge, 2008, 28:

„The former view, current early in this century, that the Hittite lexicon was largely of “foreign” non-Indo-European provenience, has proved incorrect. That false impression was due to the technical character of the vocabulary of a large number of texts dealing with public and private ritual, cult, augury, and the like, on the one hand, and details of social and military organization, on the other, all of which reflect the culture of AsiaMinor and the Near Eastern world of the second millennium BC. On the level of **basic core vocabulary**, Hittite (and the rest of the Anatolian family) is **firmly Indo-European.**“

Questions to answer:

(I will be grateful for further ideas and literature)

- How is the distribution of foreign words among stem classes? Which criteria did the society use to integrate words into certain classes?
- Why are so many foreign words *i*-stems? Are *i*-stems a favorite class for integrating loan words?
- Does the *i*-mutation play a role in why new words were incorporated in this class?
- There is a big number of foreign words beginning with *a*-. What is the percentage between inherited, foreign and loan words? Is there an untypical situation? Are all the vowels affected?
- Is the high number of *i*-stems of (presumably) foreign origin only due to the type of texts and the transmission variety?
- Have those words been used among the population in diary speech or only/mainly in written „literature“?
- In which period those words entered in the language? Is there a main period in which Hittite was very receptive?
- ...

References:

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- HW² = Friedrich, J., Kammenhuber, A., *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg, 1975
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