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History of the Middle East and the Aegean Region c. 1380-1000 B.c.

Edited by I. E. S. Edwards, N. G. L. Hammond &amp; E. Sollberger

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER XVII

### THE STRUGGLE FOR THE DOMINATION OF SYRIA (1400–1300 B.C.)

#### I. MITANNIANS AND HITTITES—TUSHRATTA AND SHUPPILULIUMASH

SYRIA lies at the crossroads of the Near East between Mesopotamia in the east, Anatolia in the north and Egypt in the south. Both Mesopotamia and Anatolia are lacking in indispensable raw materials which they must acquire by trade. For them, then, Syria means access to world trade. Through Syria pass the overland communications that lead from one to the other. More significant still, Syria possesses ports where merchandise from far-away countries is received and exchanged for whatever Asia has to offer. By land and by sea Syria is also linked to Egypt, another important centre of ancient civilization. For these reasons all political development in the Near East tends toward the domination of Syria by its neighbours. In antiquity possession of this key position assured supremacy in the world as it then existed. The fourteenth century, a period of intensive interrelations among all parts of the world, was no exception. In fact, the struggle for the domination of Syria was never more marked than during this period.

The efforts of the various powers involved in the struggle were facilitated by the ethnic and social conditions which they encountered when they invaded Syria. The Amorite rule over the country had created a large number of small city-states which were organized along feudalistic lines. This had become more accentuated when the Hurrians, revitalized by Indo-Aryan dynasts, had expanded from Upper Mesopotamia toward the west. Hurrian knights had then replaced the Amorite princes, taken over the best parts of the land for themselves and their liegemen (*mariyanna*), and now formed a caste of their own. Thus the rift between the rulers and the ruled was not only economic and social, it was ethnic as well. Anyone who gained the co-operation of the upper class could easily dominate their countries.

Egyptian power had been omnipotent in Syria in the days of

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the great Tuthmosis III. During the reigns of his successors it was definitely on the decline, until under Amenophis III (1417–1379) Egyptian domination was only nominal. The most important source illustrating these conditions is the Amarna letters, the remnants of the political archives of Amenophis III and IV. Found in the ruins of Amenophis IV's palace at Amarna they have given the name 'Amarna Age' to the whole period which they cover. The Amarna letters consist of the messages, mostly composed in Akkadian and all of them written in cuneiform script on clay tablets, which had been sent to the Egyptian court by the contemporary rulers of the great powers in neighbouring Asia and by the numerous independent princes of Palestine and Syria. At the period in question Egyptian officers, appointed to supervise and control the local princes and to collect the tribute which these had to pay to the pharaoh, still resided in the area. The Akkadian sources call such an officer *rābišu*, literally 'watcher, observer', the corresponding word in the Semitic vernacular of the country being *šākinu* (Canaanite *sōkinu*). During our period, the cities of Kumidu and Šumura served as residences for these 'commissioners' or 'regents' of Syria. Both these cities are strategically located. The former blocks the passage through the Biqā', the narrow plain between the Lebanon in the west and the Anti-Lebanon and the Hermon in the east; it is close enough to Damascus to control it as well. The latter is situated on the coastal highway, near the mouth of the Eleutheros River, and also dominates the road which leads eastward along that river to the Orontes Valley. Along the coast Egyptian control was firmer than inland. When roads were disrupted there was always the sea route to maintain communications with Egypt.

The Mitanni kings ruled in Upper Mesopotamia with their capital Washshuganni probably near the Upper Khabur River, and the influence which they exercised upon Syria no doubt depended on the fact that since the days of the Hurrian expansion many, if not most, of the small states there had passed into the hands of Hurrian princes. In the days of Egyptian weakness, the Mitannian kings used this circumstance to create a kind of Hurrian confederacy which was controlled from their capital. Mitannian power was at its height at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

It had then taken the place of the Hittites as the dominating factor. With the decline of Egyptian might after the death of Tuthmosis III the Hittites had, with considerable success, tried to re-establish themselves in Syria where they had ruled during

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## MITANNIANS AND HITTITES

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their 'Old Kingdom'. But when their homeland on the Anatolian plateau had been attacked from all sides in the times of Tudkhaliash III, they had been forced to withdraw from Syria. Yet their power continued to loom in the background as a factor with which to reckon.

The interplay of all these forces—the Egyptians, the Mitannians with their Hurrian partisans and finally the Hittites—determined the fate of Syria in the fourteenth century.

Since the middle of the second millennium the dynasty which called itself 'kings of Mitanni (Maitani)' had become dominant among the Hurrians.<sup>1</sup> From Washshuganni it exercised power eastward over Assyria and the East Tigris regions, northward over the country which later became Armenia, and westward into Syria.

Within the Hurrian realm there existed a rivalry between the kings of Mitanni and those who called themselves 'kings of the Khurri Land'. This must refer to a Khurri Land in the narrower sense of the term. The border dividing this Khurri Land from the Mitanni kingdom apparently ran along the River Mala, i.e. the Euphrates (Murad Su?). It seems that the Khurri Land had been the older of the two, but that Mitanni had overtaken it in power and political importance. Tushratta, the younger son of a Shutarna who had been an older contemporary of Amenophis III,<sup>2</sup> had acquired kingship over Mitanni in irregular fashion. Shutarna had first been succeeded by his son Artashuwara. He was slain, however, by a certain Utkhi (*UD-*hi**), a high officer of the state, and Tushratta (*Tuišeratta*), a younger brother, then still a minor, was installed on the throne.<sup>3</sup> Artatama of Khurri apparently did not recognize Tushratta as his overlord; on the contrary he seems to have claimed at least independence if not more. Judgment on the situation is rendered difficult by the circumstance that the earlier relations of the two rivalling states are not known to us. According to the beliefs of the time, the struggle which ensued between Tushratta and Artatama was conceived as a lawsuit between the two opponents pending before the gods.<sup>4</sup>

The date of Tushratta's accession to the throne falls within the reign of Amenophis III (1417–1379), more precisely into its second half. The Amarna archive has yielded seven letters from Tushratta to Amenophis III,<sup>5</sup> an indication that their friendly

<sup>1</sup> See *C.A.H.* II<sup>3</sup>, pt. 1, pp. 422 ff.

<sup>2</sup> EA 17, 21. [For brevity, EA in footnotes to this chapter refers to the Amarna letters (and their lines) as numbered in G, 12.]

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 1–20.

<sup>4</sup> §1, 8, no. 1, obv. 48 f.

<sup>5</sup> EA 17–21; 23 (Amenophis III, year 36); 24.

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relationship was maintained over a number of years. We may estimate that Tushratta's reign is to be counted from about 1385.

Whatever territory Artatama of Khurri may have controlled, Tushratta was able to maintain himself in the Mitanni kingdom for the time being. This included, in addition to Assyria and the adjoining provinces in the east, Upper Mesopotamia and parts of Syria. There, more specifically, the following territories were under his overlordship. Farthest north, in Cilicia and bordering on the Mediterranean lay Kizzuwadna.<sup>1</sup> For a long time it had shifted its allegiance back and forth between Khatti and Mitanni. The collapse of Hittite power under Tudkhaliash III had driven it again into the arms of the Mitannians.<sup>2</sup> Something similar may have happened to Ishuwa, farther east,<sup>3</sup> although nothing precise is known about it. In Syria proper the kingdoms of Carchemish and Aleppo were most important; in the circumstances, neither can have been independent of Mitanni. For the first this is confirmed by the role it played in the later Hittite war of conquest; for Aleppo there is documentary proof that it once formed part of the Hurrian system of states.<sup>4</sup> Further to the south were located the countries of Mukish (with its capital at Alalakh) and Ugarit. Formal relations with the Mitanni state are assured for the former;<sup>5</sup> for Ugarit this remains doubtful. Its position on the coast may well have resulted in conditions different from those which prevailed inland; under the protection of Egypt, Ugarit may have maintained a precarious kind of independence. The Nukhash Lands, between the bend of the Euphrates and the Orontes, definitely belonged to Tushratta's realm.<sup>6</sup> In the Orontes valley we find Neya (Ne'a), Arakhtu, and Ukulzat ruled by Hurrian dynasties<sup>7</sup> which no doubt maintained friendly relations with the Mitanni king. Finally there are, in the far south of Syria, Qatna, Kinza (Kidsa = Qadesh on the Orontes), and Amurru. Here Mitannian influence was counterbalanced by the Egyptians, and local princes found it necessary to play the dangerous game of aligning themselves on one side or the other, as circumstances required.

Tushratta at first experienced no unpleasantness in his relations with the Hittite kingdom. As long as the Hittites remained recoiled upon their Anatolian homeland and maintained themselves with difficulties, there was no opportunity for friction.

<sup>1</sup> §1, 4.<sup>3</sup> §1, 8, no. 1, obv. 10 ff.; no. 7, i. 8.<sup>5</sup> §1, 9, nos. 13 and 14.<sup>7</sup> §1, 8, no. 1, obv. 31 ff<sup>2</sup> §1, 8, no. 7, i, 7, 38.<sup>4</sup> §1, 8, no. 6, obv. 23; cf. §1, 3.<sup>6</sup> §1, 8, no. 3, i, 2 ff.; §1, 6, i, 4 ff.

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The relations of Mitanni with Egypt were friendly. Friendship with Egypt had been a traditional policy of the Mitanni kings for several generations. A number of marriages had taken place between the royal houses. Artatama, Tushratta's grandfather, had sent one of his daughters to the pharaoh,<sup>1</sup> and Shuttarna, his father, had given his daughter Gilu-Kheba in marriage to Amenophis III<sup>2</sup> (an event which falls into that king's tenth year,<sup>3</sup> i.e. about 1408). Tushratta himself was to continue this policy by sending one of his daughters, Tadu-Kheba, for the pharaoh's harim.<sup>4</sup>

The inactivity of the Egyptians in Syria made it possible for Tushratta to remain on friendly terms with Amenophis III during all of the latter's reign. When it is realized that this was so in spite of the expansionist tendencies of Mitanni in Syria, one is led to assume that a formal understanding must have existed by which the coast of Syria and all of Palestine, including the region of Damascus, was recognized as an Egyptian sphere of influence, the rest of Syria being considered as Mitannian domain. During the later part of Tushratta's reign, good relations with Egypt became more and more a necessity, because a powerful personality had in the meantime ascended the Hittite throne and had initiated a period of Hittite renaissance.

Probably not long after the events which brought Tushratta to the throne of Mitanni (c. 1385), a shift of rulership also took place in the Hittite country. Under Tudkhaliash III the previously mighty kingdom had shrunk into insignificance from which it had only partially recovered before the king's death.<sup>5</sup> If some of the lost territory, especially along the eastern border had been regained, this had been due to the military leadership of the king's son, Shuppiluliumash.<sup>6</sup>

Upon his father's death Shuppiluliumash became king as the next in line. In him there came to the throne a powerful man who was destined to restore the might of his country and to secure for it a position second to none. The ambitions which must have spurred Shuppiluliumash from the outset made him cast his eyes almost automatically upon Syria, where earlier Hittite kings had won glory. Hence an armed conflict with Tushratta became inevitable. It was postponed for some time only because Shuppiluliumash had to reorganize his homeland before he could think of embarking on a war of conquest in Syria.

<sup>1</sup> EA 24, iii, 52 ff.; 29, 21 ff.<sup>2</sup> EA 17, 26 ff.; 29, 21 ff.<sup>3</sup> G, 17, sect. 866.<sup>4</sup> EA 19, 17 ff.; 22, iv, 43 ff.<sup>5</sup> G, 4, vi, 28, obv. 6 ff. (cf. §1, 4, 21 ff.).<sup>6</sup> See below, p. 117.



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This was done with comparative ease, for the Hittite system of government was more firmly knit than that of the Mitannians. The ruling class among the Hittites had long since become amalgamated with the Anatolian population. Strong feudalistic tendencies still lingered on, but as a whole the Khatti Land proper was now governed by officials who were appointed by the king, preferably members of the royal family. Around this inner core of the kingdom an outer ring of vassal states had been formed. Their rulers had concluded formal treaties with the 'Great King' and received back their lands from his hands. They had surrendered to him part of their sovereignty, above all the right to conduct an independent foreign policy. There was a marked trend toward assuring the loyalty of these vassals by tying them to the royal house of Khatti by intermarriage.<sup>1</sup>

The accession of Shuppiluliumash to the Hittite throne can be dated only approximately. It falls within the reign of Amenophis III<sup>2</sup> (c. 1417–1379), and probably later than the beginning of Tushratta's reign which was estimated above as having taken place c. 1385. It can be set at approximately 1380.

The first clash between the two adversaries must have occurred soon after Shuppiluliumash ascended the throne. Tushratta, in one of his letters to Amenophis III, tells about a victory in which he claims to have crushed an invading Hittite army.<sup>3</sup> The letter in which the report is contained is very likely the first of the letters directed to that pharaoh which have been preserved. It seems, then, that Shuppiluliumash failed in his early attempts at expansion toward the south. One may well doubt, however, that it was anything more than a testing raid.

The military situation was not yet such as to encourage Shuppiluliumash to conduct operations on a larger scale. At the beginning of his reign, the Khatti Land and the country of Mitanni had only a comparatively short border in common. It became more extended when Shuppiluliumash recovered Ishuwa which his father had lost.<sup>4</sup> But even then, for the larger part of the distance between the Upper Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea, the two countries were separated by Kizzuwadna. It must have been one of the first tasks of the young king to come to terms with this buffer state. The result of his efforts is contained in the treaty which he concluded with Shunashshura, the king of Kizzuwadna.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G, 22, 99 ff.<sup>2</sup> EA 41, 7.<sup>3</sup> EA 17, 30 ff.; 45.<sup>4</sup> §1, 8, no. 1, obv. 10 ff.; G, 4, vi, 28, obv. 12 (cf. §1, 4, 21 ff.).<sup>5</sup> §1, 8, no. 7; cf. §1, 4, 36 ff.

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Large parts of an Akkadian version and parts of a parallel Hittite version have survived. The salient fact in the treaty is that Kizzuwadna renounced its affiliation with the Mitanni kingdom and forthwith returned to the Hittite sphere of influence.<sup>1</sup> Shunashshura was treated by Shuppiluliumash with some consideration and granted certain privileges. This does not alter the fact that he had to surrender essential parts of his sovereignty, especially the right to maintain such relations with foreign countries as suited himself. The common frontier was revised.<sup>2</sup>

Shuppiluliumash also reached an agreement with Artatama, the king of the Khurri Land.<sup>3</sup> In view of the enmity that existed between Tushratta and Artatama—their law-suit was still pending before the gods—this must have been comparatively easy. From Artatama's point of view, Tushratta was a rebel and a usurper. The text of the treaty has not come down to us, but there is every reason to believe that Shuppiluliumash treated Artatama as a 'Great King', i.e. his equal; there is certainly no doubt that the treaty was directed against Tushratta. In all likelihood, Artatama promised at least benevolent neutrality in the impending conflict. This relieved Shuppiluliumash of the fear that the Hurrian might try to interfere in favour of the Mitannian; it thus enabled him to concentrate all his might against the latter. No wonder then that Tushratta considered the conclusion of the treaty as a *casus belli*.<sup>4</sup>

The relations of Shuppiluliumash with Egypt at that moment conformed with the diplomatic customs of the time, but were rather cool. The Hittite had good reason for keeping them correct. He had exchanged courteous messages with Amenophis III; we possess the letter which he wrote to Amenophis IV (1379–1362) when the latter assumed kingship.<sup>5</sup> It betrays a certain tension between the two countries. This is easily understandable when it is recalled that family ties existed between the pharaoh and Tushratta, Tadu-Kheba his daughter having been given in marriage to Amenophis III from whose harim she was transferred to that of Amenophis IV. Furthermore, the Egyptians must gradually have grown apprehensive of the Hittite's intentions. One may rather feel surprised that relations between Khatti and Egypt remained as undisturbed as they apparently did for so long. The situation suggests that Amenophis IV had no desire whatever to become involved in what he considered the internal affairs of Syria and to provide Tushratta with more than nominal support. Tushratta may

<sup>1</sup> §1, 8, no. 7, i, 30 ff.<sup>3</sup> §1, 8, no. 1, obv. 1 ff.<sup>5</sup> EA 41.<sup>2</sup> §1, 8, no. 7, iv, 40 ff.<sup>4</sup> §1, 8, no. 1, obv. 2 f.

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have hoped for more active assistance, and, when none was forthcoming, his feelings toward the pharaoh became increasingly cool. His three extant letters to Amenophis IV<sup>1</sup> show a growing animosity, and it may well be that after the third the correspondence was actually discontinued.

II. THE FIRST SYRIAN WAR  
OF SHUPPILULIUMASH

When the Hittite attack finally came, Tushratta proved unable to keep his hold on Syria. Shuppiluliumash moved at will, and all the country between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea as far south as the Lebanon fell prey to the invader.<sup>2</sup> One may assume that see-sawing battles took place before a firm frontier was finally established. As a matter of fact, existing reports—if they belong here—suggest that Tushratta conducted a counter-campaign in Syria. He is said to have reached Şumura (which had been before, and was later, an Egyptian stronghold) and to have tried to capture Gubla (Byblos), but to have been forced to retreat by lack of water.<sup>3</sup> Was this a mere show of force or was it an attempt at creating a line which made it possible for him to maintain contact with the Hurrian princes in southern Syria and ultimately with Egypt? If so, it was of no avail; the Hittite king's might proved overpowering. The most loyal partisan whom the pharaoh had in Syria, Rib-Adda of Gubla, sums up the result of the campaign in the following words:<sup>4</sup> 'The king, my lord, should be advised that the Hittite king has taken over all the countries affiliated(?) with the king of the Mita(nni) land, i.e.(?) the king of Nakh(ri)ma' (probably meaning Naharina, the name under which the Mitanni country was known in Egypt).

This move had brought Shuppiluliumash right to the border of the territory over which Egypt not only claimed, but in some fashion also exercised sovereignty. Shuppiluliumash halted here. He could not wish to antagonize the pharaoh unnecessarily at a time when Tushratta was far from completely defeated. To be sure, the Mitanni king was no longer undisputed ruler of Syria. But he may still have held open a line of communication with Egypt by way of Kinza. At any rate, Kinza defied the Hittites for a long time to come and was considered by them, even after Tushratta's downfall, as part of Egypt's sphere of influence (see below, pp. 15 f.). At

<sup>1</sup> EA 27 (Amenophis IV, year 2); 28; 29.<sup>2</sup> §1, 8, no. 1, obv. 4 ff.<sup>3</sup> EA 85, 51 ff.; cf. 58, 5 ff.<sup>4</sup> EA 75, 35 ff.



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## THE FIRST SYRIAN WAR

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the present moment Tushratta still ruled over his homeland in Upper Mesopotamia as well as all his eastern provinces.

Moreover, there existed a treaty of long standing between the Hittites and Egypt. It had been concluded when people of the Anatolian town of Kurushtama had been transferred (in a somewhat mysterious way) to Egyptian territory to become subjects of the pharaoh.<sup>1</sup> It is unknown who precisely had been the contractants, but the political situation suggests that on the Egyptian side it must have been one of the pharaohs who still controlled Syria, and on the Hittite side a king who still held at least the Taurus frontier, i.e. a king reigning before the rebellion against Tudkhaliash, father of Shuppiluliumash. It must go back to the time before the Mitannians had come on to the scene and separated the two great western powers. The treaty had almost been forgotten; it acquired new actuality only when conquest reconstituted a common frontier between them.

It is difficult to assign an exact date to this first great success of the Hittite king. It seems clear, however, from the sources that the event took place during the lifetime of 'Abdi-Ashirta of Amurru (see below) whose death occurred late in the reign of Amenophis IV, perhaps about 1365.

The Hittite victory upset the order in Syria; it destroyed Mitannian control, but it did not replace it as yet with an equally firm Hittite rule. Some of the Syrian states became Hittite vassals, a development which made them susceptible to Mitannian vengeance. Others were freed from their old obligations and thus enabled to follow their own particularistic ambitions.

To safeguard access to his Syrian dependencies Shuppiluliumash installed, perhaps at this time, his son Telepinush as the local ruler ('priest') in the holy city of Kumanni (Comana Cappadociae). The pertinent decree has come down to us in the name of the great king, his second queen Khenti, and the crown prince Arnuwandash.<sup>2</sup>

The Syrian states in the north, the territories of which were contiguous with former Hittite possessions, were reduced to vassalage. The most important among them was the state of Aleppo (Khalap). So far we have no direct testimony for a treaty between Shuppiluliumash and the king of Aleppo. We may take it for granted, however, that such a treaty must have existed.<sup>3</sup> The same can be assumed for Mukish (Alalakh).<sup>4</sup> The treaty between Shuppiluliumash and Tunip, remnants of which have survived,<sup>5</sup> may belong

<sup>1</sup> §II, 5, 208 ff.; §II, 1; 7; 8; 9; 10.

<sup>2</sup> G, 1, XIX, 25 (cf. §I, 4, 12 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> §I, 8, no. 3, ii, 14.

<sup>5</sup> §I, 8, no. 10.

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to this period. As far as Ugarit on the coast is concerned, it is unlikely that it submitted at that time. Protected as it is by mountain ranges toward the plains of the north, it could feel reasonably safe. There are indications that Ammishtamru remained true to his obligations toward Egypt.<sup>1</sup> His son Niqmaddu who later had to submit to Shuppiluliumash still corresponded with the pharaoh<sup>2</sup> and even seems to have married an Egyptian princess.<sup>3</sup> A treaty between Shuppiluliumash and the Nukhash Lands, the territories south of Aleppo, is definitely attested; the ruler of that region was at that time Sharrupsha.<sup>4</sup>

It goes without saying that Tushratta could not accept without a fight the loss even of northern Syria. In fact, we know that he reacted violently. He could not but regard the conclusion of a treaty with the Hittites on the part of the king of the Nukhash Lands as a treasonable action. Aided by a local pro-Mitannian party, an armed invasion of Nukhash by a Mitannian army was temporarily successful, but was ultimately repulsed.<sup>5</sup>

In other countries, e.g. in Neya and Arakhtu, partisans of the Mitannians must also have existed. After all, the ruling class was largely Hurrian in origin. Shuppiluliumash proved his deep mistrust of them when later, after his final conquest, he exiled most of these families to Anatolia. He probably had experienced difficulties with them. Of course, the position in which these dynasts found themselves was in no way enviable. They were caught between the three parties to the conflict: Tushratta, Egypt, and now the Hittites. The bolder among them tried to exploit the situation for their own ends and avoided commitments and eventual submission to any of the great powers. Such men were to be found particularly in southern Syria. There Mitannian supremacy had been broken, Egyptian domination was an empty claim, but Hittite influence was still too weak to demand unquestioned recognition. The princes of Amurru in particular took advantage of the opportunity that presented itself.

The kings of Amurru, 'Abdi-Ashirta and his son Aziru after him, were easily the most restive personalities in Syria at this time. A country Amurru had existed there at least since the Mari Age; it apparently lay west of the middle Orontes. Reactivated by *Hapiru* people it now showed a marked tendency to expand toward the Mediterranean coast; gradually it gained a foothold between Šumura in the south and Ugarit in the north. This had

<sup>1</sup> EA 45 (cf. Nougayrol, J., *Le Palais royal d'Ugarit*, III, p. xxxvii). See below, pp. 137 ff.

<sup>2</sup> EA 49 (cf. Nougayrol, *loc. cit.*).

<sup>3</sup> G, 16, 164 ff.

<sup>4</sup> §1, 8, no. 3, i, 2 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 4 ff.