

CHAPTER I

*Introduction*1.1 **Anatolia and Literacy**

Many biographies like to start at the end of their subject's life. The final moments or days of their hero are presented as the climax of his or her life as if somehow summing it all up. Yet the reader does not know it yet. Her curiosity is piqued and, so the author hopes, she will be eager to read on. The author then turns around and starts at the very beginning, with the hero as a baby and child, with all the excitement still far away but with all the foreboding of the end just told. The hero of this book is literacy, writing and reading, in the Hittite kingdom in ancient Anatolia, or modern-day Turkey, from roughly 1650 to 1200 BC, give or take several years or perhaps even a decade or two. In this case, too, we could begin at the end, but the demise of the kingdom is still shrouded in mystery. Our hero just disappears unseen, it seems. Sometime around 1200 BC, the Hittite state literally vanished into thin air. We think the ruling elite abandoned its central Anatolian capital Hattusa and moved away somewhere south or southeast, but where to exactly? No obvious new capital has been identified as yet. And when did this all take place? Isolated outside references to a Hittite state might extend its life to 1190 or even into the 1180s BC, but nothing compels us to assume that it was still centered at Hattusa. As we will see, the number of written records dating to the very end of the kingdom suggests an earlier rather than later abandonment. After the "fall," Hittite-style great kings pop up here and there, well outside central Anatolia, and may have claimed to carry on or believed they carried on the Hittite kingdom. Central Anatolia, on the other hand, the core of what was once the mighty kingdom, suddenly becomes a *tabula rasa* and stays so until the first Phrygian sources become available some four hundred years later in the eighth century BC.

Besides the inevitable human tragedy that must have accompanied the demise of the Hittite state, and that is invisible to us, another casualty was

cuneiform literacy. Although Hittite as a spoken language may have been ailing already for some time, at least its written form and the cuneiform script continued to serve as the official administrative medium until the last king gave up the capital city. But at that fateful moment, both the Hittite language and its cuneiform script became officially extinct. The fate of the other script, the indigenous so-called Anatolian hieroglyphs used by the Hittite kings for inscriptions in Luwian, Hittite's sister-language, was not much better. Although Luwian continued to be spoken and the hieroglyphs kept being written, most inscriptions dating to the early twelfth and eleventh century come from the northern Syro-Mesopotamian area, some 400 km away, and seem to continue a local, rather than formerly Hittite tradition. Also, the Late Bronze Age hieroglyphs' most vital function to write names on seals never returned while former Hittite institutions and artistic expressions suddenly and completely disappear from the kingdom's heartland. What do this sad end of Hittite, its cuneiform script in Central Anatolia, all that it represented, and the narrow survival there of Luwian and the Anatolian hieroglyphs in the Iron Age say about the prime of their lives?¹ For this we need to go back to the very beginning.

Writing ranks among humankind's most important and defining inventions. In history, writing systems were independently created from scratch, that is, without for us discernible outside inspiration from an already literate society, at least four times. The earliest inventions happened in the ancient Middle East, in the land of Sumer in modern-day southern Iraq, somewhere around 3500 BC, and in Egypt, probably around the same time or a little after. The two others were China (ca. 1500 BC) and Mesoamerica (ca. 500 BC). The scripts in these parts of the world arose out of pictograms inspired by their own material cultures, and the gradual evolution into real writing systems usually was a response to the growing administrative, political, and cultural needs of these early complex states. They enabled ruling classes to organize and control labor and trade, and over time writing came to be used also as a means of prestige and propaganda. As rare as these *ex nihilo* creations were, they inspired an endless string of derived scripts and writing systems that continues until the present day. The so-called primary or pristine writing systems of Sumer, Egypt, China, and Mesoamerica were responsible for all or most other scripts in the world. Spreading from its origins in southern Mesopotamia, the Sumerian cuneiform provided most of the Middle East from Iran to Turkey, from the Levantine coast to the Caucasus with

¹ For a rather dark assessment of the aftermath of the Hittite kingdom see Summers 2017.

a script that stayed in use for well over three millennia. Chinese characters became the first script in much of East Asia and still forms part of the Japanese and Korean writing systems, and in the end the very roots of our own alphabet can be traced back to Egyptian hieroglyphs.

The population groups or states that decided to adopt an already existing foreign script for their own internal use went through a fundamentally different process than the four who invented writing. Where the pristine scripts had developed over centuries, either slow and gradual, or in leaps and bounds, dictated by the growing pains of political systems, adoptions could be the result of short-term deliberate decisions. Instead of a slow development one often sees the wholesale introduction of an entire system into a community that had hitherto been illiterate. This does not say that such processes always proceeded quickly, smoothly, and linearly. The development of the originally Phoenician alphabet in the early first millennium BC is a case in point. From about 800 BC onwards we see a sudden proliferation of local alphabetic variants in Asia Minor and further westwards. The two earliest adaptations can be seen right around the turn of the eighth century in Phrygia in Central Anatolia and in the Greek-speaking world with the so far oldest evidence coming from Sicily. Soon the alphabet spread to Lydia, Caria, and Lycia in Western Anatolia. Variants of the Greek alphabet emerged all around the Aegaeon. All of these Iron Age alphabets share the innovation of separate signs for vowels but none of these alphabets are identical. With our current evidence it is impossible to come up even with a stemma that neatly explains the neighboring Lydian, Carian, or Lycian alphabets as linear descendants from either the Phrygian or Greek model. Also, all of these alphabets fairly quickly disappeared again in the onslaught, half a millennium later, of Alexander the Great and his immediate successors. Only the Greek Attic-Ionian variant eventually became standardized as *the* Greek alphabet.

One community where we can observe a contained and straightforward development from script adoption and adaptation to continued use by one particular group and one only was that of the early Hittite kingdom. Here there was no spread or diffusion with local variants and hence no standardization of a preferred variant. Around 1650 its early kings imported the cuneiform writing system, as it was used at the time in northern Syria (see Chapter 3), one of the areas that cuneiform had spread to from its Sumerian origins late in the fourth millennium. But why did they wait so long? Even stranger is the fact that already in the period between 2000 and 1725 BC, the Anatolian population had been acquainted with another, simplified cuneiform writing system used by Assyrian merchants, but they

did not seem overly interested. When the merchants left the area for good nobody seems to have had the urge to start writing for themselves. Anatolia was politically fragmented and continued its illiterate ways, as it had for ages. Handshake deals and at best impressions of seals formed the backbone of economy and trade.²

Anatolia was a harsh country with an “extraordinarily complex” landscape.³ Not only did huge mountain ranges, rising up to 3000 m in the north, south, east, and west, seal it off from the Mediterranean and neighboring countries, they also created inland pockets where local population groups could develop their own societies with their own social traditions and customs in relative isolation.⁴ The Anatolian climate has been described as one “of extremes”⁵ with severely cold winters and hot, humid summers. With, moreover, its rivers being unsuited for long-distance transport, travel was difficult enough in the more clement seasons but “virtually impossible” in winter.⁶ The resulting social and political fragmentation proved a real challenge to any local chieftains who set their sights on regional domination. There may have been some larger local kingdoms but the first, albeit short-lived, historically attested unified kingdom covering most of Central Anatolia dates to around 1750 BC. But these were not yet complex states. Individual communities continued trading and bartering in small local subsistence economies, as they had done from time immemorial.⁷ In these circumstances there was little incentive to either invent or to acquire a writing system.

The second attempt at a Central Anatolian kingdom met with more success. Between 1650 and 1600 BC Labarna, Hattusili I, and Mursili I chose Hattusa as their new power base and soon turned their attention to Syria, gateway to the east as well as to the Mediterranean. It was international diplomacy, contacts with Syrian kings, that convinced them they needed a writing system. Although the Assyrian writing system might still have been remembered by the oldest in society the new kings decided to adopt the very different Syrian cuneiform and to start using it for their own purposes. Writing cuneiform and knowledge of Akkadian

² See, for instance, Susan Sherratt 2003: 230 (“people all over the world and throughout history have traded successfully with varying degrees of complexity and sophistication without the need for writing”).

³ Sagona & Zimansky 2009: 1. ⁴ Schachner 2011a: 33–40 (esp. 36).

⁵ Sagona & Zimansky 2009: 1, 5.

⁶ Weeden 2014a: 34; see also Hoffner 2009: 18, Alparslan & Doğan-Alparslan 2018: 233.

⁷ For the most recent and reliable attempt so far at gauging the population size in Central Anatolia in the Hittite period see Simon 2011a; on a total of 987 settlements he estimates 877 with a population of well under 100.

were prerequisites in the world of politics of the moment. Before long, they adapted the script to write their own language and cuneiform writing became the internal recording standard. But in spite of the Mesopotamian writing conventions that came with the script the Hittite state was selective in what it committed to writing and cuneiform never gained wide acceptance. Existing evidence suggests that writing was only practiced within the circles of the ruling elite and, compared to Mesopotamia, the total volume of written documents remained small. Telling in this respect may be the fact that proper verbs for “writing” or “reading” never developed. The normal Hittite terms are the very generic *iye-* and its derived synonym *aniye-* “to do, make.” For “reading” *au(š)-/u-* “to see” was used. The direct object of the “doing” is what one writes, a letter, a literary composition, a ritual etc., and one does so “on a tablet” or “with/using a tablet.”⁸ The latter two can overlap but the instrumental “with/using a tablet” is preferred when contrasting a written with an oral message.

In trying to come up with a term for “writing” the Hittites could have compared its characteristic motions to similar looking activities. As we will see (Chapter 6.3), the possibly earliest attested reference to the act of writing used in the Hittite language is *hazziye-* “to stab, pierce.” This is not an inappropriate way of describing writing if one observes someone applying a stylus to a clay tablet, repeatedly pressing the pointed stylus into the surface. Yet this is only attested twice, the second occurrence stemming from the other end of Hittite history, the late thirteenth century BC, in reference to an iron tablet where the cuneiform signs were probably punched in. Besides the ubiquitous “doing” the only other verb occasionally used is *GUL-š-* or *gulš-* (Chapter 10.5), originally meaning “to make a mark” with something. That “something” could be anything ranging from beer poured in a circle around an object to a sharp instrument to incise signs or figures in a hard surface like metal. These two verbs come close to other languages that often use technical terms for “scratching” or “carving” to express the notion of writing. But the default expression remained “to do/make (a text) on/with a tablet.” Like many societies that adopted cuneiform writing, the Hittites did, however, borrow the Mesopotamian word for “tablet,” Akkadian *tuppum* becoming Hittite *tuppi*.⁹

⁸ For the various constructions see van den Hout 2016a.

⁹ Following Streck 2009: 136–40, I write *tuppum* with a plain *t* instead of emphatic *t*.

What made the Hittites suddenly decide to become literate around the middle of the seventeenth century BC? What was the impetus to start recording the oldest known Indo-European language? What did they use writing for and how did the technology and its use develop over the centuries? What are the reasons to think that writing never caught on in the population at large? Despite this seeming reluctance they developed early on a second script, this time one of their own design, and used it for public display. Why? And what happened to their writing systems when around 1200 BC their kingdom collapsed and vanished? These are the overarching questions I want to answer in this book. Using all available evidence, and only that, as I will explain in more detail below, I have tried to sketch as comprehensive and consistent a picture of writing and reading in Hittite Anatolia as possible. But before embarking on this let us see who these Hittites were.

1.2 Defining the Hittites

The records of the Hittite kingdom reflect the history of Anatolia (nowadays Turkey) from about the mid-eighteenth century BC up to its very end around 1200 BC. The presence of Hittite speakers in Central Anatolia can already be assumed for the turn of the third millennium. Hittite names and those of Luwians, speakers of a language closely related to Hittite, are attested in the records of Assyrian merchants who had settled in Anatolia around 2000 BC. Yet other names point to speakers of the Hattian language in the same area. Hattian is completely unrelated to Hittite and Luwian and remains a so-called linguistic isolate with no immediate connection to any other known language, ancient or modern. Following the sociolinguistic reconstruction by Petra Goedegebuure we can envision the Indo-European Hittites and Luwians settling in Central Anatolia in the course of the third millennium BC.¹⁰ The Luwians largely merged with the already present Hattian population within the bend of the Classical Halys or modern-day Kızıl Irmak River. A bilingual society resulted, in which the Hattian element was culturally dominant, still visible in the early historical period of the Hittite kingdom with its overwhelmingly Hattian pantheon and Hattian names of its kings. The Hittite speakers, meanwhile, inhabited the more eastern parts of Central Anatolia right towards the area where the Halys originates. Around 1750 BC a local king by the name of Anitta established here the center of the first unified Central Anatolian kingdom

¹⁰ Goedegebuure 2008.

1.2 *Defining the Hittites*

7

including the Luwian-Hattian population groups. Originally, he came with his father from Kussar, probably to be sought in the same general eastern area, and conquered Kanesh or Nesa (modern Kültepe), as it was also known, the center of the Assyrian commercial activities. This town he made his capital. One of his many acts of war was the conquest, subsequent destruction, and cursing of the town of Hattus, as it was called in Hattian, or Hattusa, as Luwian speakers knew it. A few other towns were raided, razed, and perhaps cursed but Anitta seems to have singled out Hattusa for special treatment, sowing cress on its fields in order to avoid immediate resettlement. Although Anitta may have harbored some personal grudge it is more likely that he already sensed the potential of the site as a future power base. Anitta's kingdom was short lived but about a century later that same Hattusa re-emerged as the capital of choice of a new wave of Hittite invaders led by a certain Labarna. This was the beginning of the Hittite kingdom that was to dominate Anatolia for the next almost 500 years.

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, Labarna and his successors assumed the name of the conquered population and called themselves “men of Hatti” or “men of the land of Hattusa.” In doing so they boldly asserted themselves as the new power in the region but at the same time declared their intention to maintain and perhaps even integrate into local conditions. They did not force their own name on the indigenous people. As we will see time and again, this practical attitude towards their new surroundings is perhaps *the* defining characteristic of the Hittite state. It has little to do with altruism and everything to do with a will to survive and cleverly improvising their way to the top. In taking the definitive step towards literacy, however, they chose neither Hattian nor Luwian but held on to their own Indo-European Hittite language, the one they came with, as the official medium of their administration. Even though from now on they wanted to be known as the “men of Hatti,” the name from which our modern term “Hittite” derives through the intermediary of the Biblical *Hittim* “Hittites,” they still called their own language “the language of Nesa (Kanesh).” This is one of the very few explicit holdovers from their roots going back to Anitta and the Hittite kings held on to it for the rest of their history. Since they used the “Nesite” language, that is, Hittite, for internal administrative eyes only, they could do so without political consequences. But, as we will see, they found other means to address the wider and largely Luwian-speaking population. All this was based on practical decisions and they cared little for feelings of nostalgia. For the historical Hittites history started with their rule from Hattusa and there was no “Golden Age” tradition associated with Nesa or

any other place or region.¹¹ With “Hittite” and the “Hittites” I therefore refer to the Central Anatolian kingdom that between ca. 1650 and 1200 BC used the Hittite language as its main internal means of written communication while controlling a population that spoke several other (mostly related) languages and largely continued their own centuries-old customs and traditions. As a consequence, I will also often use the terms “Anatolian” and “Anatolians” for the same people.¹²

To this linguistic diversity of Hittite, Luwian, and Hattian we can add the Palaic language in Northeast Central Anatolia, another branch on the Anatolian branch of Indo-European languages. Also, it is not unlikely that forerunners of the first-millennium Anatolian languages related to Hittite, Luwian, and Palaic, although not yet written, were already spoken during the days of the Hittite kingdom in the western and southern coastal areas. These are the Lydian, Carian, and Lycian languages with inscriptions each in their own distinctive alphabetic scripts from the eighth through fourth century BC. By the beginning of the AD era the Anatolian branch, at least in its written forms, was ultimately extinct. This variety of languages and population groups is not surprising in view of the “extraordinarily complex” landscape with its huge mountain ranges and its climate “of extremes.” Anatolia’s geography and ecology encouraged social and political fragmentation with pockets of local languages and customs being able to exist in a kind of splendid isolation.¹³ Although early Hittite kings liked to boast that they “made the lands the borders of the seas”¹⁴ the truth is that probably only Central Anatolia was ever truly under their direct control. The further one gets away from the center towards the coastal regions in the west and to the mountains separating it from Mesopotamia in the east

¹¹ Gilan 2015: 195–201.

¹² Hittite culture and society are often described as a kind of melting pot adding a substantial Hurrian element to the mix. From a Central Anatolian standpoint, however, the latter never probably was a substantial ethnic component. The Hurrian wave that we see rising in Hittite history towards the end of the fifteenth century BC was in all likelihood mostly an elite affair that had little impact on the Anatolian population at large. In his article “Toward a Definition of the Term Hittite” Hans Güterbock (1957) drew attention to the various linguistic and cultural elements in the mostly religious Hittite texts and spoke of a “mixed civilization” (1957: 237: “It is the presence of foreign elements that makes us speak of a mixed civilization, and it is their subordination under the Hittite element that justifies the name Hittite for this mixed civilization.”). Definitions often amount to an adding up of all linguistic strands we find in the texts (cf. Beckman 2016: 320–1) but by doing so we may overestimate the impact of such cultural influences on the population as a whole. Anatolia may not have been more mixed than most other regions in the ancient Middle East. For a recent discussion of these questions see Gilan 2015: 195–201.

¹³ Schachner 2011a: 33–40 (esp. 36).

¹⁴ *nuš arunaš irbuš iēt* KUB 3.1 i 16–17 (also i 7, 26; CTH 19, NS), ed. by Hoffmann 1984: 16–17 (in her overall line count: i 8, 17–18, 27).

1.3 A Note on the Hittite Economy

9

the more we have to think in terms of spheres of influence instead of domination and direct control.¹⁵ Economically, socially, and religiously these more remote parts were largely independent. The long arm of Hittite power rarely reached there in its full force and Hittite kings may not even have felt the urge to do so. They intervened when they considered their influence imperiled but otherwise contented themselves with control from afar allowing and condoning local conditions and traditions. This practical attitude is aptly illustrated by the Hittite concept of the proverbial “Thousand Gods.” Instead of imposing a single centralized pantheon and an accompanying cult, the Hittite kings preferred to induct local gods into an all-encompassing national hall of deities categorized according to a system of Stormgods, Sun deities, Tutelary deities, while at the same time allowing more unique *numina* to be worshipped.

1.3 A Note on the Hittite Economy

The two economic models usually mentioned for ancient Near Eastern societies are the staple finance and the wealth finance systems. In a staple economy it is the state that collects, stores, and controls “subsistence goods such as grains, livestock, and clothing,” and it uses them to remunerate people who work for the state.¹⁶ Given the inherent bulkiness of these staples, the efforts in storing them, and the transportation hurdles offered by the Anatolian landscape, a centralized system seems not to be the most obvious option in the Hittite situation. In a wealth economy, the state tries to control the procurement of and trade in raw, precious materials like gold and silver as well as the manufacture of finished products out of them by craftsmen, “provided as part of a labor obligation from the local communities.”¹⁷ The state can then use these goods to fund government activities, particularly political services. Because of their being lighter and smaller they are much easier to store and transport. An added bonus is that they are also much less perishable than the usual staple goods.

Although there may not always be an automatic correlation between an area’s ecology and its economic system, given the specific character of the Anatolian landscape the Hittite choice for an overall wealth finance model combined with local subsistence economies is exactly what recently scholars have argued for. Of course, wealth and staple finance are not mutually

¹⁵ Glatz 2009. ¹⁶ D’Altroy & Earle 1985: 188; see also the various papers collected in Earle 2002.

¹⁷ D’Altroy & Earle 1985: 188; for a full discussion and *Forschungsgeschichte* of ancient world economics see Burgin 2016.

exclusive. On the contrary, they support each other but the question is one of emphasis. The Hittite state clearly cared about and invested in the organization of staples, especially cereals. Agriculture was not without its challenges and cyclical droughts forced the ruling elite to keep a watchful eye on local situations in order to maintain a stable political system. The second part of King Telipinu's proclamation of the late sixteenth century BC documents a network of over ninety storehouses for grain throughout Central Anatolia; the texts from the provincial site of Maşat Höyük attest to the worries in ruling circles about the plundering of grain fields by starving Kaskaean; on the archaeological side, the silos in Hattusa and provincial centers are an eloquent testament to the Hittite state seeking to guarantee a regular and steady flow of foodstuffs. The recurrent droughts in Anatolia were a potential source of unrest and upheaval among the population. In order to avoid this, the state invested in mobilizing the staples and organizing them at a local level and thus tried to provide for the inevitable lean years. The storage facilities mentioned in the Telipinu text cover the core of Hatti-Land as well as the Upper and Lower Land and bespeak a fine-grained and therefore also highly localized or decentralized system of local networks that together form the Hittite kingdom.¹⁸ Within such a system it is possible to work without written records to a large extent. Also, we need to take into account the fact that the administrative texts from Maşat have so far not been matched by any similar records at other provincial sites. Finally, there is the near-total silence of the Hittite sources on trade.¹⁹

What might require written administration, on the other hand, is the wealth finance part of the system. This is exactly what our so-called palace storeroom inventories (see Chapter 8.7) are about.²⁰ Also, the passage from the Instruction of the Temple Personnel quoted extensively later on (see Chapter 10.2) offers the perfect example for the control the palace tried to exert on the distribution of wealth and possible related record keeping:

If by the palace silver, gold, textiles, (and/or) things of bronze are given to him (i.e., a member of the temple personnel) as a gift, it should be specified: "King so-and-so has given it to him" and it should likewise be recorded how much its weight is. Furthermore, the following should be recorded as well: "They gave it to him at such-and-such festival." Witnesses, too, should be recorded after (it): "When they gave it to him, so-and-so, and so-and-so

¹⁸ See Schachner 2017: 230 and the map in Singer 1984: 123.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the Mycenaean Linear B records are likewise silent on trade relations and trade organization; see Panagiotopoulos 2017: 27–9, for the Hittite situation see Hoffner 2001: 180.

²⁰ For all this see in detail Burgin 2016.