

WAS THE HITTITE KING MUWATALLI II KILLED?

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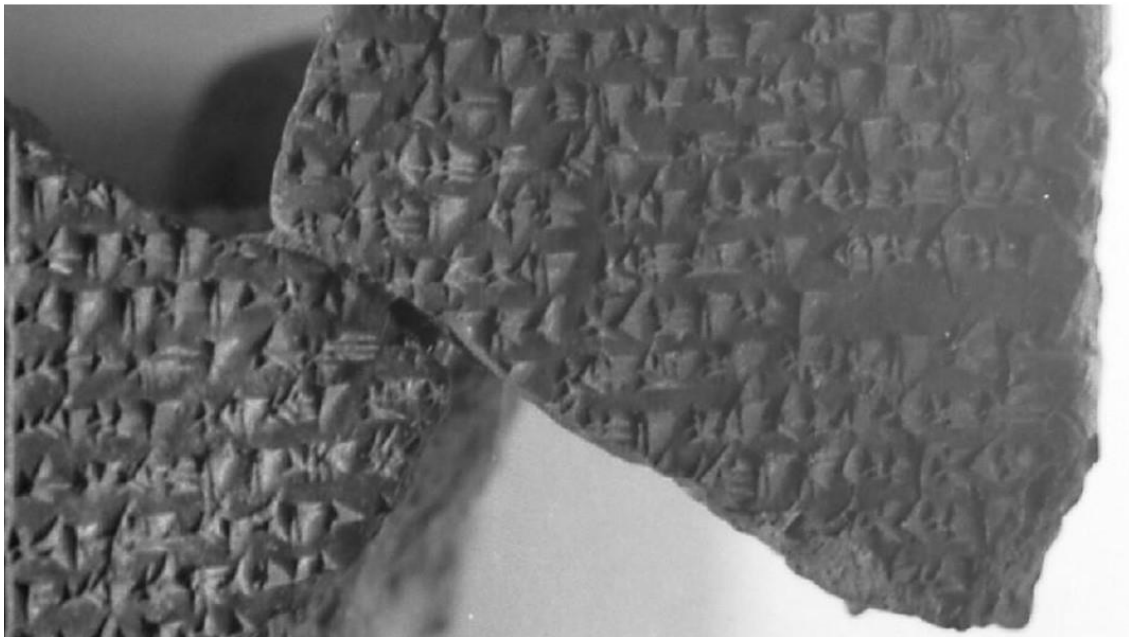
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In this brief note, we cast doubts on the death of the great Hittite king Muwatalli II. Going through the prayer CTH 383 in which the king's impiety against the priestess of the Sun-goddess of Arinna is emphasized and condemned, we argue that Muwatalli II was dismissed and killed: *"he paid for it with his head"*.

Muwatalli II, first-rank son, legitimate heir and successor of the Hittite king Mursili II, ascended the throne around 1295 B.C. Moving the capital of the Hittite kingdom from the vulnerable Hattusa to the more manageable southern town of Tahrunthassa (Catalogue of Hittite Texts CTH 81, CTH 85), Muwatalli II made a political and religious breakthrough that (possibly) met strong inner opposition (Bryce 2005). The highly divisive shift was (possibly) also caused by the royal wish to favour the cult of the Storm God of Lightning as an alternative to the widely venerated Sun-goddess of Arinna. After the transfer, Muwatalli II appointed his youngest and ambitious brother Hattusili as Governor of the Upper Land and King of the land of Hapkis (CTH 81). Muwatalli II made war against the aggressive Ramesses II's Egyptian kingdom, taking part in the first ever recorded battle, the battle of Kadesh in 1274 B.C.

Muwatalli II (possibly) favoured his second-rank son Urhi-Teshub who (possibly) flanked him in his last years. Nevertheless, a few texts seem to suggest that Urhi-Teshub (possibly) ran counter to his father's wishes (CTH 89, CTH 387). When Muwatalli II died around the year 1272 B.C., he (apparently) left no "first rank" male heirs. Therefore, Urhi-Teshub took the crown, flanked by his powerful uncle Hattusili. A few years later (about 1265 B.C.) the 50-years-old uncle deposed the nephew and assumed the kingship with the name of Hattusili II, beginning a ca. 28-years long reign together with his beloved wife, the chief priestess Puduhepa. It is noteworthy that both Urhi-Teshub and Hattusili II were largely unpopular among their own people (CTH 86, CTH 105, CTH 590). Their ascensions to the throne were classified as unlawful not just by parts of the Hittite aristocracy, but also by their Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian royal counterparts (CTH 155, CTH 172, CTH 173).

We focus here on an overlooked detail that sheds new light on the fate of Muwatalli II. The Hattusili's prayer of exculpation to the Sun-goddess of Arinna (CTH 383) encompasses a plea of king Hattusili and his wife Puduhepa concerning the sins of the former Hittite kings (Lebrun 1980). The Figure shows the tablet CTH 383 and a magnification of the lines that we are going to assess.



The tablet CTH 383 and its magnification. Modified from:

<https://www.hethport.adwmainz.de/fotarch/bildausw.php?n=Bo%202057&b=+N03606+N03607+N03608+N03707+N03913+N03914+N04089+N04090+N04092+BoFN00381+BoFN00382+Phb01272+Phb01273>

Among other issues, the prayer describes an episode occurred during the reign of Muwatalli II. The king brought a formal trial against his own stepmother Danuhepa, who was the chief priestess of the Sun-goddess of Arinna and the powerful last wife and widow of his father Mursili II. The case led to the (possibly transient) downfall of Danuhepa and to the ruin of her sons and followers. Both Urhi-Teshup (CTH 297) and Hattusili III (CTH 383) seemed eager to lessen their own responsibility in Muwatalli II's haunting of Danuhepa, being (apparently) concerned about the possible revenge by the Sun goddess of Arinna to them. It is worth mentioning that Danuhepa was (possibly) restored to royal favour after Muwatalli II's death.

In the prayer CTH 383, Hattusili aims to dissociate himself from his brother Muwatalli II, explicitly stating that he is not involved into the matter of the ruination of Danuhepa's son. In particular, he states what follows:

“The one who did that evil thing (i.e., Muwatalli II) has become a God (i.e., has already died). He stepped down from the road and paid for it with his head. ...The one who has carried out the matter of Danuhepa, that one has already paid for it himself.” (Singer, 2002).

The crucial passage states that (Del Monte 2003):

¹⁵*na-at IŠ-TU SAG.D[U-Š]Ú ka-ru-ú pa-ra- a šar-ni-^rik¹-ta*

Which means: *“(Muwatalli II) paid for it with his head”*.

The words “SAG.DU” and “šarnink” stand, respectively, for “head” and “to compensate”. It is noteworthy that the same words are used in Telipinu's edict (CTH 19):

⁵²*nu SAG.DU-na-az šar-ni-ik-du*

with the same meaning: *“(the king who did evil things against his brothers or sisters) will pay with his head”*.

In sum, the text CTH 383 clearly states that Muwatalli II was dismissed and killed.

Who did it to Muwatalli II? Hit men sent either by Hattusili, or Urhi-Teshub, or Danuhepa? Unknown sons of Mursili II? A Palace plot? A popular uprising against the king's decision to turn deities or to change the capital?

REFERENCES

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