Proverbs and Rhetorical Strategies in § 7’ of the Hittite Instructions for Priests and Temple Personnel (CTH 264)

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He who has listened to two contending arguments, as if in a court case, is necessarily in a better position for judging.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* III 1, 995 b 2–4

In the *Instructions for Priests and Temple Personnel* (CTH 264), a composition of the later Middle Hittite period preserved in numerous New Hittite copies,1 § 7’ deals with the case of the possible fraudulent misappropriation by the priests of sacrificial animals—fattened oxen and sheep—intended for the gods, and their substitution with animals of poor quality.2

The first part of the paragraph provides a long list of potential offences, as if they were items of case law. The considerable space devoted to theft and damage to animals in the *Hittite Laws* confirms the importance of this matter in Hittite society.3

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2 On the manuscripts in which the § 7’ is preserved see Miller 2013: 252 (they are: A = KUB 13.4 ii 6”–24”; B1 = KUB 13.6+ ii 1’–16’; C1 = KUB 13.5 ii 17–33, G = KUB 31.93, 1’–2’; M = Bo 8054, 1’–10’). See Hoffner 1997: 68–91. Cf. also the anecdote of Aškaliya in the Old Hittite *Palace Chronicle*, see Dardano 1997: 47, 97–100, 169. Note that both in CTH 264 and in the Hittite Laws the paragraphs on rustling are followed by those on thefts in buildings (CTH 264 § 8; *Hittite Laws*, I series, §§ 93–97) and on fires in buildings (CTH 264 § 13; *Hittite Laws*, I series, §§ 98–100).
The final part of the paragraph, however, is structured in the form of dialogue, in which are compared the contending theses supported respectively by the two parties involved—the priests and the issuing authority. The paragraph ends with a warning to the priests.

(18") nu ki-iš-[(ša-an) an-da pé-e-(da-at-te-ni)] DINGIR-LÌ-wa-ra-aš ku-it nu-wa UL (19") ku-it-ki [(me-ma-i nu-wa-an-n)a-a(š)] UL ku-it-ki ,i-ya,-zi (20") nu-za UN-an-[(na a-ù zi-aš-ták-ká)]n ku-iš :zu-u-[(wa-an 1)]GÌ(A-wa-az (21") pa-ra-a pít-t[(i-nu-žì) EG(1R-a)]n-da ma-ah-ḫa-an an-zi DINGIRMES-aš-[ma-z[(1-anz da-aš-šu)]-uš nu e-e-pu-u-wa,-an,-zi UL nu-un-tar-nu-žì, (23") e-e-p-zi-[(ma ku-e-d)]a-ni me-e-ḫu-ni nu nam-ma ar-ḫa (24") UL tar-na-a,i, [(nu-žà)] DINGIRMES-aš zi-ni me-ek-ši na-ah-ḫa-an-te-eš e-eš-tén4

18’’-19’’ You argue thus: “Since he is a god, ‘He will not say anything and he will not do anything to us.’” 20’’-21’’ Watch (out for) the man who before (literally: from) your eyes makes the food of your desire disappear!

21’’ Subsequently, as soon as it occurs, 22’’-24’’ “The will of the gods is strong! It does not hasten to seize, but once it does seize, it does not let go again.”

24’’ So be very fearful of the will of the gods!5

The use of direct speech and the recourse to stylistic features of the spoken word characterise not only this paragraph but the whole text, whose tone is indeed more one of advice than obligation.6 The presence of a proverb (“The will of the gods is strong! It does not hasten to seize, but once it does seize, it does not let go again”) is one of the features of § 7’ already identified by scholars.7

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4 Text according to Miller 2013: 252.

