A Brief Note on the Syntax of Writing in Hittite

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1 Introduction

One of the most remarkable books in Hittitology for me is Jana Siegelová’s *Hethitische Verwaltungspraxis im Lichte der Wirtschafts- und Inventardokumente*, published in 1986. With exemplary philology, she presented the relevant texts and was able to make sense out of the most barren records, bringing to life an aspect of Hittite society until then only dimly glimpsed. It is thus with great admiration and gratitude that I offer this brief note to Jana Siegelová with my best wishes for continued productivity.

Hittite texts virtually exclusively inform us of the concerns of the elite in their religious and political life. The economic sources are among the few that document some of the work the retaining class did to make their overlords’ privileged existence possible. Even if they afford us only a small peek into this side of Hittite life, they constitute an invaluable addition to our understanding of their society. Scribes and clerks formed an important group among those retainers. Their writing activities were essential to the running of the state. According to our sources, the Hittite language had various ways of expressing the concept of recording a message on a tablet. Among the several terms for script carriers, we find the originally Semitic loanword *tuppi* (n.) ‘(clay) tablet’ and nouns like *(G)IŠ.(ḪUR)/GI* *gurda*- ‘label, list’ (*vel sim.* or *G)IŠ LÊ Ū* ‘(wooden) tablet’. Serving as terms to express the notion of ‘writing, recording’ are verbs such as *iya-/aniya*- (lit. ‘to do, make’), *Ḫatrae*- ‘(to send a (written) message)’, *Ḫazzīye*- ‘to stab, make a stabbing motion’ and *GUL-Š*- ‘to mark’.2 These are the main ingredients for the different constructions that I will discuss in the following.

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1 I am grateful to Petra Goedegebuure and Hannah Marcuson for reading the manuscript as well as for their suggestions.

2 I will write GUL-Š- instead of gulš- following the discussion in Waal 2014.
-šan/-kan tuppi(ya) (dat.-loc.) iya-/aniya-/ḫazziya-/gul-š- ‘to write etc. (something) on a tablet’

In this first construction the script carrier stands in the dat.-loc. as the object on which a text is written. The most important verbs we find are iya- and aniya- and all examples are in the passive voice. Compare:

(1) sîr.meš=ma=ššan appi[(zziya)] ANA ṬUPPA₃⁴ ṢA SISKUR aniyanta
KUB 55.65 iv 41–42/KUB 32.123 + KBo 29.206 iv 42–43 (CTH 772, NS)
“The songs are written on the final tablet(s) of the ritual.”³

(2) ṬUPPU MAMIT=ma=mu kuit TAŠPUR ṬUPPU MAMIT=wa=mu arḫa […]
nu zik waštaš nu=kan ANA ṬUPPI MAMIT kuit DŪ-an […] KBo 18.28 iv 13–14 (CTH 190, NS)
“Concerning the oath tablet that you had written me about, (saying):
‘The oath tablet […] from me, you have erred! What [was] written on
the oath tablet […]’.”⁴

(3) nu=kan ANA [TU] PPI RIKILTI ŠA ABU=YA ṾKASKAL.KUR ῳRummata
ZAG-aš iyanza BT i 23–24 (CTH 106, NS)
“On the treaty tablet of my father, the ᾳKASKAL.KUR of (the town of)
Rummata is described as the border.”⁵

In what one could consider an extension of the same construction including the particle and the passive voice, we also find examples with the deponent ki- ‘to lie, be laid down (in writing)’ and the verb zinne- ‘to finish (being written)’:

(4) nu=ššan ŠA ῳR Kizzuwatni annalli tuppi kiššan kuit kitta‘rîι KBo 38.260
rev.? 14 + KBo 21.37 rev.? 17 (CTH 479, OlderS⁶)
“what is laid down as follows on the old tablet from Kizzuwatna.”⁷

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³ Translit. Starke 1985: 314–315. Unless one wants to emend to appizziya<š> the sg. appizziya in KUB 32.123 iv 42 may indicate that the pl. ṬUPPA₃⁴ stands for a collective tablet series.


⁶ For the time being I will use “OlderS(cript)” in order to avoid the no longer very useful and by now confusing traditional distinction between Old Script (OS) and Middle Script (MS) to indicate the ductus of the general period preceding the rise of New Script (NS) during the second half of the 14th century.