DOCTRINES OF CAUSALITY IN HITTITE AND BIBLICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: A PARALLEL *)

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The increasing number of Hittite texts has furnished some important comparative material for the study of the Bible. This is especially true of the field of historiography, which was a literary genre in the Ancient Near East, apparently introduced by the Hittites and brought to artistic perfection by the Israelites. Hittite historiography was the prototype of the later Assyrian annalistic literature and possibly influenced the historical writing of the Bible as well, in spite of the latter's uniqueness.

The present paper attempts to point out a parallel between Hittite and Biblical historiography involving similar methods, based on the doctrine of causality, which explain national catastrophe. We shall deal first with the chronologically earlier example, taken from the Hittite sources.


1) For Hittite historiography in general cf. GÖTZE, Hethiter, Churriter und Assyrer (Oslo, 1936), pp. 73 ff., and especially GÜTERBOCK, "Die historische Tradition bei Babylonierern und Hethitern", ZA XLIV (1938), pp. 94 ff.

2) If so, the extent of this influence and the manner in which it was transmitted remain to be studied. One possible way of absorbing features of Hittite civilization would have been the ancient population of Jerusalem, which was, according to Biblical tradition, partly Hittite. After the conquest of Jerusalem by David its prominent citizenry would certainly have been incorporated into the Israelite administration; cf. YEIVIN, "Jerusalem under the Davidic Dynasty", VT III (1953), pp. 149 ff.; also MAISLER, BJPES XIII (1947), pp. 105 ff. (Hebrew).

3) For the Hittite sources, especially the annals of Murshili, this doctrine was clearly recognized by FURLANI, Saggi sulla civiltà degli Hittite (Udine, 19:9). It seems that Murshili, whose Plague Prayers are discussed in our paper, advanced the historiographical character of the annalistic literature more than anybody else. As to Biblical historiography, the principle of causality would appear to be one of its most basic features; cf. the remarks of CASSUTO, "The Rise of Historiography in Israel", Eretz-Israel (Arch. Histor., and Geogr. Stud.), vol. I (Jerusalem, 1951), pp. 85 ff. (Hebrew).
Murshili, the Hittite king (c. 1340-1310), composes a prayer to the Hattian Storm-god and other Hattian gods concerning a catastrophic plague 1) which had broken out in the Hittite Empire during the reign of his father, Shuppiluliuma (c. 1375-1340), and had already lasted for twenty years. Murshili asserts his innocence in connection with the deadly disease and is eager to expose the causes of the national disaster by means of an omen, a dream, or prophecy. The king finally consults an oracle whereby he learns of the existence of two ancient tablets providing a clue for the outbreak of the epidemic. For our problem, we are interested only in the second tablet, concerning which we quote the relevant passage 2): “The second tablet concerned Kurushtama. When the Hattian Storm-god had brought people of Kurushtama to the country of Egypt and had made an agreement concerning them with the Hittians so that they were under oath to the Hattian Storm-god—although the Hittians as well as the Egyptians were under oath to the Hattian Storm-god, the Hittians ignored their obligations; the Hittians promptly broke the oath of the gods. My father sent foot-soldiers and charioteers who attacked the country of Amqa, Egyptian territory. Again he sent troops and again they attacked it.”

At this point Murshili tells of the Egyptians murdering one of Shuppiluliuma’s sons which led to another war against Egypt whereby many prisoners were taken. The plague first broke out among these prisoners and was carried by them into Hatti.

This is the factual record of the origin of the plague. Yet to the King’s mind there is a deeper reason for the misfortune. He finds it in the violation of the peace treaty made between the Hittites and the Egyptians, as follows: “Now, when I found that tablet dealing with the country of Egypt, I made the matter the subject of an oracle of the god (and asked): ‘Those arrangements which were made by the Hattian Storm-god,—namely that the Egyptians and the Hittians as well were put under oath by the Hattian Storm-god, that the Damnashsharas deities 3) were present in the temple of the Hattian Storm-

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3) The exact character of these deities, apparently witnesses to the treaty,