

LOCUSTS IN THE HITTITE CULTURE

HİTİT KÜLTÜRÜNDE ÇEKİRGELER

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the place of locusts in Hittite culture by comparing the Mesopotamian and Egyptian samples. Locusts appear in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts as an expression of multiplicity or in texts including locust invasions. In Hittite documents, the word is written with its Sumerian equivalent, BURU₅, or Hittite equivalent maša-. The documents that include the expression locust are letters, prayers, ritual texts, mythological texts and omens. It is commonly seen to be included in religious texts. In addition, a letter mentioning that Kaškaeans' grain was eaten by locusts is the only document in the Hittite archives that shows the concrete example of locust invasion. The less frequent mention of invasions suggests that documents mentioning them may have been written on wooden tablets.

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmada Mezopotamya ve Mısır örnekleriyle karşılaştırma yapılarak Hitit kültüründe çekirgelerin yeri üzerine bir inceleme yapılması amaçlanmıştır. Çekirgeler, Mısır ve Mezopotamya metinlerinde sayıca çokluk belirtme ifadesi olarak ya da çekirge istilalarını içeren metinlerde karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Hitit belgelerinde Sümerce BURU₅ ya da Hititçe karşılığı maša- ile geçmektedir. Çekirge ifadesinin yer aldığı belgeler mektup, dua, ritüel metinler, mitolojik metinler ve fal metinleridir. Çoğunlukla dini içerikli metinlerde yer aldığı görülmektedir. Bunun yanında Kaşkaların tahılının çekirgeler tarafından yendiğinden bahseden bir mektup, Hitit arşivinde çekirge istilasının somut örneğini gösteren tek belge olarak bulunmaktadır. İstilalardan bu denli az bahsedilmesi söz konusu içerikli belgelerin tahta tabletler üzerine yazılmış olabileceğini düşündürmektedir.

INTRODUCTION

Locusts appear in the Ancient Near Eastern texts both as a metaphoric expression of multiplicity and a literal expression as an insect. They are documented in holy books as well as cuneiform texts. In Hittite texts, the term “locust” was written mostly with the Sumerian ideogram BURU₅, and sometimes with its Hittite equivalent, *maša*-,¹ which appears in documents from different text groups such as letters, rituals and prayers. Before analysing its place in Hittite culture, it would be appropriate to present a short synthesis of Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures based on previous studies in order to make comparisons.²

MESOPOTAMIA

In Mesopotamian texts, it is seen that the word was written as Sumerian BURU₅, just like the Hittite texts, in addition to its Akkadian equivalent *erbu*.³ Besides texts we see locusts also represented in Mesopotamian art (Fig. 1⁴, Fig. 3).



Figure 1: Locust Depiction on a Seal Impression / *Mühür Baskısı Üzerinde Çekirge Betimi*

Mesopotamian written sources mention locust invasions in different periods and regions. The information about the first documented invasion is obtained from the Mari documents of the Zimri-Lim period around 1770 BC.

¹ See Puhvel 2004, HED M: 92-93, Poetto 1991, CHD L-N 203-204.

² For a few examples in the Syrian-Palestinian region, see Borowski 2002: 303-304.

Pictogram of a locust (L120, GRYLLUS) is attested in Hieroglyphic Luwian sources: IZGIN 1, l. 7. PITHOS. GRYLLUS-pa-wa/i-mi|| (URBS); IZGIN 2, l. 10 PITHOS. GRYLLUS-z[i²]-[pa]||-wa/i-ta (URBS), name of a city which the stela was probably set up. (Hawkins 2000: 315 s.).

³ Different types of locusts are mentioned in Akkadian texts: *adudillu, erib, garābi, erib nāri, erib tāmti, erib turbu'iti, hilimu, irgīlu, irgīšu, kulīlu, lallarītu, sigdu, šaršaru, šaširu, šinnarabu, šā'īlu, zīru, zirzīru, zizānu* CAD E: 258. For the meaning of some of these, see Lewis/Llewellyn-Jones 2018: 10.

⁴ Hayes Ward 1910: 252.

The documents in question are letters of the governor of Qattunan⁵ written to his superiors in Mari. According to the documents, the problem was solved by destroying the eggs of locusts in a period of two years.⁶

Another invasion is known through two letters found in Dūr-Katlimmu⁷ in the Middle Assyrian Period. Assyria reached the western border of Hanigalbat during the Tukulti-Ninurta Period. In a letter from an official in the area, it is mentioned that some refugees had left the region because locusts ate their crops. During this period, it is thought that the locust invasion threatened the whole Habur region, because in the second letter they mentioned the upper part of Hanu and this region is located between Habur and Balih (Fig. 2).⁸⁻⁹

The third document dates back to the reign of Sargon II around 710 BC. This invasion is known through four letters. The letters are the answers from different cities to the royal instructions on how to deal with locusts. They are reports mentioning that locusts are wiped out. As far as the letters are concerned, the plague has spread to a wide region.¹⁰

In addition to the physical actions and measures taken against the locust invasions, it is known that a prayer was addressed to the goddess Nanaya for protection from locusts.¹¹

Considering both the above-mentioned texts, and the recent history with examples from modern-day, the consequences of locust invasions are clearly seen. It is obvious that they cause devastating damage with the capacity to destroy crops in a short time. For this reason, locust invasions also appear in the omen texts. In these texts, there are predictions of events when locust invasion will take place. For example, the following statement appears in a letter from a diviner to an Assyrian king: “If at the appearance of the moon (the star sign of) Scorpius

⁵ Qatnu. It is a Middle and Late Bronze Age and Iron Age city which is located north of Mesopotamia probably at the east of the Habur River. See Bryce 2009: 581.

⁶ Radner 2004: 11-13.

⁷ Tell Sayh. It is located in the northwest of Mesopotamia and east of Habur, and dates back to the period between the Late Chalcolithic Age and the Early Islamic Period. See Bryce 2009: 204 s.

⁸ For further information, see Radner 2004: 13-15. In her work, Radner draws attention to the correlation between war and locust invasions, and in relation to the locust invasions mentioned in the letters from Qattunan region and in the documents found in Dur-Katlimmu, she believes that locust population could not be dealt with due to wars and consequently, the invasions took place.

⁹ van den Hout 2013: 25.

¹⁰ See Radner 2004: 15-19.

¹¹ Radner 2004: 18 and fn. 46. For prayer, see also Lewis/Llewellyn-Jones 2018: 608.

Apart from written sources, locusts are visually found on amulets and seals. They were pierced to pass through a rope or wire and were probably used to get protection from locust invasions.²¹

Locust invasions are also mentioned in the scriptures and considered as punishment of God.²² To give an example, in Exodus 10, 4-6, it is stated that if Pharaoh refuses to release the Israelites, he is threatened with locust invasion to his country and they will eat all the crops and trees, and fill the Egyptian homes.

HITTITES²³

When we look at the Hittite culture which constitutes the main subject of our article, it is seen that locust is found in different contexts. The first of these is a letter found in Maşat Höyük and written to Kaššu and Pulli by the Hittite king. The letter in question mentions that locusts ate the grains of Kaškaeans. The related passage is:

(1) HKM 19 OBV. 7-8²⁴

7 I-NA URU Qa-aš-qa-[m]a-wa hal-ki^{HLA}-uš

8 BURU₅^{HLA} e-ez-za-aš-ta

7 “In Kaška

8 locusts ate the crops.”

Another text with the expression locust is the prayer text for the god Telipinu dictated by Muršili II. In this prayer text, locusts, fire, epidemic and hunger are among the things that are wanted to be removed from the land of Hatti:

(2) KUB 24.1 III 16'-17'²⁵

16' IŠ-TU KUR URU Ha-at-ti-ma-kán i-da-lu-un ta[-pa-ša-an]

17' hi-in-kán ka-aš-ta-an (erasure) ma-a-ša-an-na a[r-ha u-i-ia?]

16' But from the land of Hatti [drive] o[ut] the evil fever,

17' plague, famine, and locust

In the duplicate text of the same prayer, there is hope that these negative things will occur to the enemy country:

(3) KUB 24.2 REV. 10'-11' DUP. KUB 24.1 IV 7-8

10' nu i-da-lu-un ta-pa-aš-š[(a-an)] [hi-in-k]án

11' ka-a-aš-ta-an-na (erasure) BURU₅^{HLA} a-pé-e-da-aš A-NA KUR.KUR.^{HLA} L]Ú KÚR pa-a-i

10' give bad fev[er(?), pla]gue,

11' famine and and swarm of locusts to those enemy lands.

It is also seen in a similar way in an evocation ritual:

(4) KUB 15.34 II 46-48²⁶

46 ...na-aš-ta i-da-a-lu i-da-a-lu-[(un GIG-an)]

47 ta-[(pa-aš-š)a-an i-da-a-lu] hi-in-ga-an BURU₅^{HLA} hu-wa-a[(p-pa)]-na-[(tar)]

48 du-[(ud-du-m)i IŠ]-TU KUR URU Ha-at-ti ar-ha har-[(ni-ik-tén)]

46 ... evil, evil [(illness)]

47 f[(eve)r], [evil] plague, locusts, bad health,

48 *duddumi* eradicate from the land of Hatti.

In a ritual text, it is one of the things that are wanted to be taken to the sea by the river. The passage in question is:

(5) KBO 12.94²⁷ 3'-9'

3' [...] rÍD¹.SA₅ pé-e-^rda ÍD. SA₅¹-m[a²-]a[t²...]

4' [... -a]n-ti-ia pa-ra-a pa-a-ú

5' [...-i]a-^raš¹-m[a-a]t a-ru-ni pé-e-da-a-^ru¹

6' [... N]AM.LÚ.U₁₉.LU-aš GU₄-aš UDU-aš HUL-lu U[H₇ ...]

7' [... H]UL-un ir-ma-an HUL-un hu-ul-la-[...]

²¹ Kenawy/Abdel-Hamid 2015: 21.

²² For the related passages from the holy books, see Sayed 2018: 584.

²³ For a similar treatment of the topic see also Ünal 1977: 437-438.

²⁴ Alp 1991: 148-151.

²⁵ CHD L-N: 204, Rieken *et al.* 2016sqq.

²⁶ Trabazo 2002: 594.

²⁷ See Fuscagni 2012 ff.. Since the text is very fragmented, it was deemed appropriate to include only transliteration. Lines 7-9 in the CHD are translated as follows: [Let] the sea keep bad illness, evil rebell[ion (?)], the locust, the *m.* insect and the short [lifespan] (CHD L-N: 204).

8' [...] BURU₅-an mi-ša-ra-an²⁸ ma-ni-in-ku-u-wa^ran^l(-)...]

9' [...] a-ru-na-aš an-da e-ep

According to the information obtained from two catalog tablets, there were rituals performed against locust invasions. Since we do not have the tablets themselves, unfortunately we are only aware of their existence and we do not know how the ritual is performed. In the first example, Kiura, Kagga and Zalagga are seen as ritual performers and it is stated that the ritual is performed in case of a locust invasion in a city. The related passage is:

(6) KBO 10.6²⁹ OBV. I 5-7

5 [DUB x^{KAM} INI]M ^mri^l-ú-i-ra ^mKa-^rag^l-ga Û ^mZa-la-ag-g[a]

6 [...] -ša ma-a-an ^rBURU₅^l-aš ^rku-e-da^l-ni URU-ri ^rki^l-ša-an-za

7 nu^ra-pé^l-e-^rda^l-ni URU-ri ŠA BUR[U₅] SISKUR DÙ-an-zi

5 tablet x. Word of Kiura, Kagga and Zalagg[a].

6 [...] If a swarm of locusts occurs in any city

7 they perform the ritual of the locust in that city.³⁰

The other example mentions an incantation against a swarm of locusts that consisted only in one tablet:

(7) KBO 31.8 + KUB 30.42³¹ OBV. I 18

18 DUB I^{KAM} ŠA BURU₅^{HLA} hu-uk-ma-iš QA-TI

18 One tablet: incantation of swarm of locusts. Finished.³²

The concept of locust also appears in the omen texts. These omen texts are of Mesopotamian origin and are eclipse-themed.³³ They prophesy that there will be a locust invasion in the country if the lunar eclipse occurs at certain periods. The passages are as follows:

(8) KUB 8.1³⁴ II 16-17

16 [m]a-a-an I-NA UD 15^{KAM} DXXX-aš a-ki KUR-e an-da

17 [m]a-ša-aš pa-ra-a-i BURU₁₄^{HLA} ka-ra-a-pi

16 [I]f on the 15th day the moon dies

17 a swarm of locusts will appear in the land and devour the crops.³⁵

KUB 8.1 III 3

3 ma-a-an I-NA UD 21^{KAM} DXXX-aš a-ki KUR-e an-da
BURU₅ a-ra-i

3 If on the 21st day the moon dies a swarm of locusts arise in the land.³⁶

Attestations are found also in two poorly preserved mythological texts. Due to their fragmentary condition the context is incomprehensible. The first example is a fragment of the Hedammu myth:

(9) KBO 26.117 1'-3'³⁷

1' [... h]al-[k]i-in (erasure)

2' [... -a]k² EZEN₄-ni an-da

3' [...] x-ŠU BURU₅^{HLA} ar-ḥa ME-a[š]

The second example is a fragment of a Hurrian-Hittite mythological text.

(10) KBO 26.116 5'-6'³⁸

5' [...-z]i nu-uš-ma-[a]š DINGIR^{MES}

6' [...B]URU₅ la-la-u-e-š[a(-)...]

Lastly, a palace inventory text mentions a locust as a valuable object made of gold:

(11) KUB 42.11 I 10³⁹

10 I BURU₅ KÙ.GI

10 I locust (made of) gold.

²⁸ "grain pest, weevil" (HED M: 162).

²⁹ Dardano 2006: 82.

³⁰ See also CHD L-N: 204.

³¹ Dardano 2006: 22.

³² CHD L-N: 204.

³³ See also Koch-Westenholz 1993.

³⁴ Riemschneider 2004: 65-68.

³⁵ CHD L-N: 204.

³⁶ CHD L-N: 204.

³⁷ Rieken *et al.* 2009sqg a.

³⁸ Rieken *et al.* 2009sqg b.

³⁹ CHD L-N: 204.

CONCLUSION

If we gather the data obtained from Hittite texts, locusts are seen as a phenomenon that should be kept away from the Hittite country, and there are attestations of rituals performed in case of locust invasion. Among the Hittite documents, the only concrete example of a locust invasion is attested on a letter (Text 1) mentioned above as an invasion in the country of Kaška. Apart from this, we have just a few documents mentioning locusts and locust invasions: an omen text prophesies a locust invasion in case of a lunar eclipse at certain periods (Text 8). Locusts are mentioned in a negative sense as well in a prayer of Muršili II to Telipinu, god of vegetation (Texts 2, 3) and in two ritual texts (Texts 4, 5). Specific rituals and incantations were performed against locust invasions, as we know from the catalog tablets (Texts 6, 7). Further mentions of locusts in mythological context are incomprehensible due to the bad condition of preservation of the texts (Texts 9, 10). Finally, a palace inventory shows that images of locusts existed as valuable objects made of gold (Text 11). These mentions show that the occurrence of locust invasions was not exceptional in the Hittite lands, although only one concrete case is documented. It can be assumed that locust invasions were recorded on documents with economic content which is known that we do not have many documents, and it is believed that the texts in question were generally written on the perishable material, for example, on wooden tablets.⁴⁰ It might be thought that information about locust invasions and damage to crops might also be recorded in the economic texts written on these wooden tablets.

⁴⁰ Symington 1991: 111 and fn. 4.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAD I. J. Gelb *et al.* (eds.). *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2010.

CHD H. G. Güterbock, H. A. Hoffner† *et al.* (eds.). *The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1980–

CTH Emmanuel Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites* - Paris 1971 : Klincksieck, 1971 (with supplements in *RHA* 30 [1972]: 94–133 and *RHA* 33 [1973]: 68–71; now extensively expanded and revised in the online *Catalog der Texte der Hethiter* of the *Hethitologie-Portal Mainz*: S. Kořak and G. G. W. Müller, hethiter.net/. Catalog [2019-10-08], at: <https://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/CTH/>

HED J. Puhvel, *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*, Berlin-New York 1984–.

HKM S. Alp, *Hethitische Keilschrifttafeln aus Mařat-Höyük*, Ankara 1991.

KBo Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy.

KUB Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy.

L preceding numerals = Laroche 1960 sign numbers.