

Hattusa

Hittite Capital





Introduction

With this article we want to give you a better understanding and insight into an important ancient kingdom which became one of the most powerful empires in the Near East next to Assyria and Egypt. Its dominant rule lasted for over 600 years and brought about 30 kings to the Hittite throne.

Despite certain periods of enormous internal struggles between two branches of the royal family and assassinations of kings the Hittites influenced strongly the whole region including Assyria, Mitanni and Egypt. They traded with all these powerful kingdoms and empires, but also ended up in military conflicts with them. Finally, the growing power of Assyria took over the declining Hittite empire.

Hittites are often mixed up with Hattians who lived in Anatolia around 4,500 years ago before Hittites moved into the area from the north. Their language was of Indo-European origin different to the Hattian language and script.

The main purpose of this article is to introduce you to the impressive Hittite capital Hattusa. For this we want to give you a short run down of Hittite history.

This will help you to understand the basics of historic background, social and state structure, religious beliefs, military power and regional expansion which is in many ways mirrored in the erection of their well planned capital with many temples.

Three Main Periods

It all started with the so-called Old Kingdom about 1750 BC and this first period lasted for 250 years. Nine kings were recorded during this time span. The Middle Kingdom survived only for 70 years and six kings are found on the list for that period.

The New Kingdom again went on for 250 years until 1200 BC and this last period was also called the Hittite Empire. Twelve kings ruled during these important times of expansion. Hittites were the forerunners of the Iron Age in the Near East and were really the first to produce iron as early as 3,400 years ago.

Old Kingdom

King Anitta from Kushara is seen as the first Hittite ruler, but as he had destroyed Hattusa, before it became capital, later kings did not want to see his name in the family tree of rulers. So Labarna I. became the first documented king. And Hattusili I. was the first to reside in Hattusa.

During this period the Hittites were successful in conquering Aleppo and even Babylon. But during the Old Kingdom a longer period of internal power struggles between the different branches of the royal family led to five assassinations of rulers.

Middle Kingdom

King Telepinu ended the 70 year long royal power struggle with the Proclamation or Edict of Telepinu. It recorded in details the past hap-

penings with assassinations, as well as set out new rules of royal succession. He also established the Panko a general assembly which acted as high court and set up a detailed legal code.

The power struggle was fought between the north branch of the royal family residing at Zalpuwa and later at Hattusa and the south branch at Kussara and Kanesh also called Nesa. The Old Kingdom was an absolute monarchy, but the Middle and New Kingdom were the first constitutional monarchies in history.

New Kingdom

This was the most successful period of Hittite rule. During this period, they destroyed the kingdom of Mittani and won the famous battle of Qadesh against Egyptians. This led to the first peace treaty in history in 1259 BC. A copy of this cuneiform clay tablet is exhibited at the United Nations in New York a photo of which is part of this article.

Interesting is a report that Hittites even fought a maritime battle off Cyprus and that one king died of pest imported to Hattusa by prisoners. Hattusa was attacked several times and burnt down once but rebuilt. But when it was again burnt down in 1200 BC the capital was abandoned forever.

Hittite History

The peak period started in 1400 BC under King Tudhaliya I. and lasted for 200 years.

During this important period the empire expanded dramatically. Towards the end King Hattusili III. led the famous battle of Qadesh against Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II. which the latter lost and ended with the already mentioned first peace treaty in world history.

Nevertheless, Ramses reported at home to have won the battle with great success and documented how he crushed the enemy with large relief depictions of his heroic actions at the famous Karnak Temple in Luxor.

In another military action King Musili I. conquered and plundered Babylon, but was not interested to integrate it into the Hittite Empire or to govern it at all. He was only interested in its treasures which he brought home. Thereafter the empire declined and segregated into small city states.

State Organization

The Hittite state became a rather complex structure with feudal principles over time. The various subdued vassal kings were ruled by the main king called taberna. The main king was also high priest, leading judge and top military leader. All vassal kings had to give oath to subject to the main king. This oath had to be renewed with any new main king coming onto the throne.

But next to the main king also important vice kings existed for the main cities of Qadesh and Jamchad Halab today's Aleppo and later also for Mira.





Royal Family

These vice kings were members of the royal family of the main king and had more independence than vassal kings. It is interesting that the main queen called tawananna had a high level of independence and could sign her own contracts. Naturally she was also the highest priestess and did not lose this position when her husband died.

Senate and Constitution

Next to the main king existed the already mentioned senate called panku. It was involved in all laws and treaties. The senate could hold kings responsible and even could judge over them.

In 1460 BC King Telipinu implemented a game changing constitution which formalized the tasks and responsibilities of the king, the senate and implemented royal succession rules. And the senate was the guardian of this new constitution. Now the king for the first time in history had the role as primus inter pares.

Early Hittite Law

As mentioned above King Telepinu introduced a high court and excavators found two cuneiform clay tablets with over 186 legal articles regulating transgressions and penalties. The judgments included death penalty, torture and financial compensation. But not all people were equally judged because men, women and slaves were sentenced differently strong in this order.

History of Hattusa

Hattusa was discovered already in 1834 by French officials. The old Hittite capital flourished during the time of Assyrian merchant colonies. Unfortunately, 1750 BC it was destroyed by King Anitta from Kushara and thereafter restored by King Hattusili I. He made Hattusa his capital about 1600 BC and it became the most important Hittite city for next 350 years.

But militant tribes from the Kaska region destroyed Hattusa again and under King Suppiliuma I. it was rebuilt once more. In 1237 BC the capital was expanded under King Tudhaliya IV. with two sections including a royal acropolis and the lower city.

Geographical Situation

Hattusa lies about 150 kilometers east of Ankara near the modern village of Bogazköy. Today only the foundations are left. But part of the massive city wall was reconstructed. At the time it was a huge city with a maximum exten-





sion of 180 hectares measuring two kilometers across. Unfortunately, it was not built on flat terrain and was situated on a slope with a level difference of 280 meters.

Excavations

First excavations of Hattusa started in 1905 by German archaeologists and still are going on today. There was really little left of the glorious large capital of the Hittites. Not even remains were left of the massive surrounding city wall. They found only foundations and this is what visitors see today. A 65 meter long section of the city wall was reconstructed to give an impression of its previous dimension. But excavators were lucky and found part of the royal archives with over 33,000 cuneiform clay tablets.

City Details

Hattusa consisted of three zones the upper



and lower city area and a citadel expanding over two square kilometers. Imagine over 30 temples existed for the various gods alone. And 25 of them were clustered together alone in the upper city. They were either square or rectangular in shape. The temple for main storm god Tarhunt was the biggest with 20,000 square meters erected on the acropolis. All temples were also schools with teaching scholars and with archive rooms where many bilingual texts written in Hittite and Hurritic script were kept. The kings resided in a fortified castle not an open palace.

Massive City Wall

A nine kilometer long city wall system protected the various districts. The immense wall structure had a thickness of eight meters and a height of thirteen meters. It was erected using a case mate type double wall with cross walls at short distance in between. Towers re-



inforced the wall at intervals of twenty meters. The major city gates were flanked by impressive sculptures of kings, warriors, lions or sphinxes.

Upper and Lower City

The upper city area was a pure cultural district with about 1,000 god statues. Two gates gave access to the lower city area. It was a rather large city area with smaller houses and over 400 years its layout was often changed. At the beginning houses with open yards were built. Later the courtyards were covered and priests, officials, traders and artisans lived here. Farmers lived outside Hattusa in small rural settlements.

Houses were built of mudbrick with wooden support in walls and flat roofs with wooden beams. There were various rooms and ovens but no running water. This needed to be transported from various water supply points in the quarter. But waste water canals were running underneath streets.

Great Temple

But the Great Temple did lie in the lower city with a central open flagstone paved court yard with 82 small and large rooms along its outer walls. It was erected on raised terrasse. This temple was really huge and covered 14,500 square meters. Normally buildings were erected with mudbricks on stone foundations. But here stone blocks were used some up to five meters long and weighing nearly twenty tons each. The roof was flat and covered with wooden beams. Here the main divine couple storm god and sun goddess were furnished each with its own sanctuary chamber.

Many of the rooms served as storage magazines with built in underfloor pottery containers with a capacity of nearly 1,800 liters. Also, many cuneiform clay tablets were found here as well with interesting records of temple activities.

Giant Food Storage

To survive attacks and possible siege



attempts a unique underground grain storage was built with a capacity of 9,000 tons. The complex with sixteen underground silos in a double row was erected 3,600 years ago. They measured 120 by 40 meters. When filled with grain they were covered with clay. In this air tight system, they could be stored for many years.

This huge amount could feed a population of 30,000 inhabitants for one year. The city population varied between 10,000 to 40,000 and most of them were living outside the city walls. But during attacks they could



find shelter inside.

Experts established that Hittites farmed outside Hattusa wheat, barley and lentils. Their menu was certainly much more varied. Flax was also farmed for clothing but the main supply was sheep wool. Deer hunting in the nearby forests was reserved to the royal family. And there were lots of forests at the time around the capital. So, there was no lack of timber for construction.

Water Supply System

There were several springs some in the city area and the main water needs were channeled towards seven cisterns, two in the lower city and five huge basins in the upper city area. They were crucial for Hattusa. The two large basins measured 70 by 15 meters and were up to eight meters deep. The others were half the size.

The Ridge

This important height lies in the northeast of the capital and raises 100 meters above the lower city. Its extension measures 550 by 200 meters and first settlement traces date back over 8,000 years. So, it was possibly the first area used by Neolithic hunter gatherers as camping ground or first settlers as permanent home. Later Hittites formed three artificial platforms to use the space. Later the underground grain storage system was erected at





its foot.

Early Iron Production

Hittites were the first to produce iron. They had for some time a monopoly on iron manufacture. But they used meteorites and did not smelt iron. Weapons like swords made of iron had a major military advantage against weaker bronze weapons used for example by Egyptians and other powers in the region. Hittites also used horses and war chariots and they were more advanced than Assyrians at the time.

Hittite Pantheon

The main Hittite deity was Tarhunt also called the conqueror or king of heaven or lord of the land Hatti or king of Kummiya. His representative animal was a strong bull. His wife



was sun goddess Hapat her Hurrian name or Arianna. Tarhunt was similar to Hurrian storm and weather god Tesup.

Burial Sites?

As no necropolis was found experts assume that Hittites possibly used cremation for their burial rituals. Possibly an important rock sanctuary outside the city walls played a role here as well. Numerous reliefs of Hittite rulers and gods were engraved on the natural rock walls.

Yazilikaya

This rock sanctuary was situated about two kilometers northeast outside the city walls and was dated with an age of 3,300 years. Three open rock chambers were constructed with various religious buildings in front. Today only the foundations are left, same as for the whole of Hattusa. Various man sized reliefs were carved on rock walls.

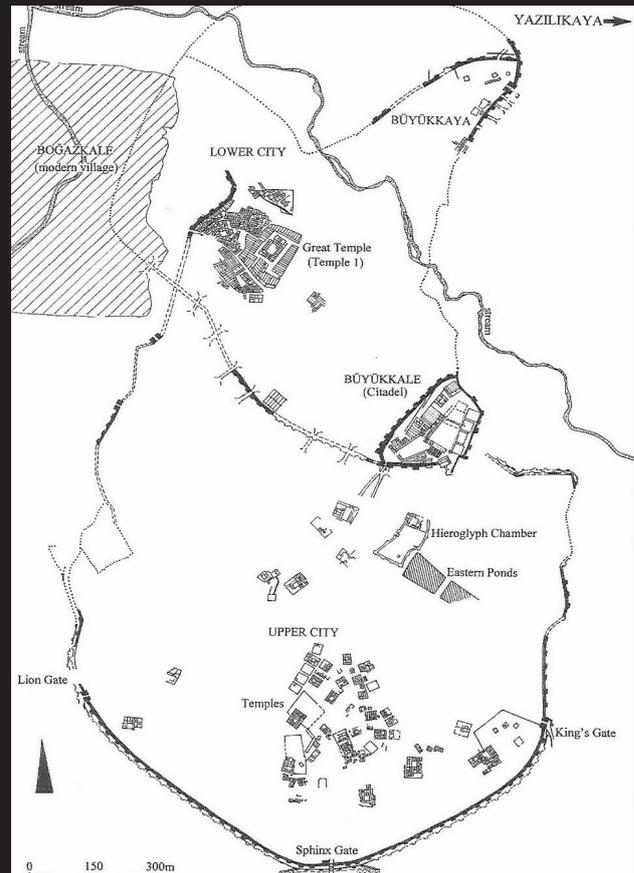
Sanctuary Details

The main chamber reliefs show two processions of gods. Interestingly, here their Hurrian names Teshub and Hapat were used. Also depicted was King Tudhaliya IV. living around 1200 BC. The side chamber could only be entered via a narrow passage in the rocks. This natural entrance was guarded by carved demons. Inside three reliefs were engraved on rock walls including a ceremony of New Year festivities for their main two deities storm god and sun goddess which in their religious world were a married couple.

Language and Script

Its language was closely related to Luwian. Hittites called it Nesili as it was first spoken at the city of Nesa. It belonged to the oldest Indo-European languages. The Hattic language spoken in the area before was unrelated because Hittites moved into the area from the north.

With regard to written scripts the royal archives at Hattusa housed over 30,000 cuneiform clay tablets with records of different content. They were written in the Akkadian diplomatic language and various Hittite dialects. In 1915 the Hittite language was deciphered in Berlin and now all texts could be read and translated. This gave a totally new insight into their history.

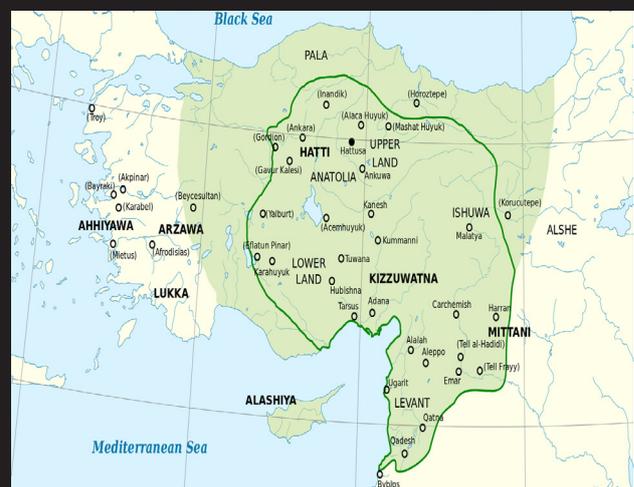


Hittite Reference

Hittite was identical with the Egyptian Kheta kingdom mentioned 1650 BC in the famous Amarna letters and archives. Its name also appeared on cuneiform clay tablets found with trade details at Karum Kanesh.

Records Elsewhere

Some cuneiform clay tables from Hattusa with copied text of the peace treaty with Egypt can be seen today still on various buildings such as the famous Ramesseum walls in Luxor and hypostyle hall reliefs at the important Karnak Temple. In addition, bas relief pictograms on rock panels were





found at Ivriz in Anatolia, at Jerablus and in the Carchemish area, as well as in Babylon and Hamath in Syria.

Reginal Activities and Reach

These were all areas travelled by Hittite traders and kings on military campaigns. For this reason, various Hittite seals were found at Megiddo and Kusakli Sarissa. In the latter city 65 bullae were found as well. Bullae were the first form of clay envelopes for tablets with cuneiform recordings. Mostly they were attached to goods transported to record their content, sender and receiver.

Summary

Despite so little to see at the site itself it is worthwhile a visit. The choice of such a hilly landscape for a capital is interesting. Certainly, a secure water supply made the important difference for this decision. All ancient cities were situated either on the banks of rivers or close to springs. Unfortunately, the unearthed archaeological treasures are distributed in various museums. It would be nice for tourists to see them in a museum on site. The only place to see some interesting wall reliefs with figures of kings and deities is the close by sanctuary of Yasilikaya.

Picture Credits

We thank DAINST, the museums, photographers and archaeologists for using some of their pictures and sketches.

