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Distinguishing Archaisms, Innovations and Errors in Hittite Manuscripts

I. Introduction

A. It is standard practice in IE traditions where textual evidence may be periodicized to privilege older stages in analyzing language history and prehistory: in Indic Vedic over Epic and Classical Sanskrit and within Vedic the Rigveda. Likewise Homeric Greek over Classical, etc.

B. Since the 1970s our ability to distinguish Hittite texts in Old and Middle Script vs. New Script copies of Old and Middle Hittite compositions has enabled the same for Hittite. I follow Klinger 2022 in insisting, against some recent claims, that the essentials of the distinction between Old and Middle Script remain valid, and my OH/OS and MH/MS corpora differ only in detail from those of Goedegebuure (2014:12–32). Like hers, my assignments to OS vs. MS differ in some cases from those of the Konkordanz (cf. her remark 2014:7–8), and I do not include any MH/MS texts of a ritual nature (cf. Goedegebuure 2014:11–12). See further on this point see IV.2 below.

C. An unfortunate tendency to apply the principle in A too mechanically in Hittite must be rejected, for several reasons:

1. The OH/OS corpus is very small. Some grammatical features may be lacking due to chance. Barring major new finds, we must cautiously exploit the evidence of MS and NS copies and even assured NH compositions. Proper evaluation of **possible** archaisms in these corpora depends crucially on determining as far as possible the synchronic grammar of MH and NH, based on assuredly contemporary manuscripts. Cf. Melchert 2016a:240–41 and see II.A and III.A below.

2. Synchrony is a powerfully useful concept vital to modern linguistics, but it is in strict terms a fiction. Language change is intra- as well as intergenerational, and all divisions into successive synchronic stages are arbitrary. We must expect to find and do find incipient innovations in OH/OS and undeniable archaisms in assured NH compositions (see illustrations in Appendix 2).

3. All copies **are** copies. MS copies of OH texts may have higher ratios of archaisms to innovations and scribal inventions than NS copies of OH texts, but MS copies also contain innovations, unreal forms, and errors and cannot be privileged over NS copies. Whether a MS or NS variant reflects the correct older form must be determined on a case by case basis (see IV.A and IV.B below).

II. Archaisms Uniquely Attested in NH Compositions

A. Alleged “Suppletive” Use of *akk-* ‘die’ for Passive of *kuen-* ‘kill’

1. Contra *GrHL*¹ §21.13, Cotticelli-Kurras 2010:299, et al. true suppletion already disproven by contrast in MH and NH of *akkant-* ‘dead’ (vs. *huišwant-* ‘alive’) and *kunant-* ‘slain’ (vs. *appant-* ‘captured’): compare HKM 10:40 *appantet kunantit* vs. KUB 23.72 Vo 14 *antuwaḥḥaš kuiš āggānza* ‘the person who is dead’ and KBo 4.4 ii 75 *nu=wa kunanzaš=a mekki*^{LÜ} *appanzaš=wa m[ekki]* ‘both the slain were many and the captured were many’ vs. KUB 31.66+ i 29’ [*ÜL=aš kui*]t *akkanza TI-anza=aš* ‘since he is [not] dead; he is alive’.

2. Use of *aki* in the Hittite Laws (OH/OS) proves nothing, since most societies refuse to recognize lawful executions as killing: no one is sentenced ‘to be killed’ or ‘is killed’ by hanging, in the electric chair, etc. Use of *iddak* ‘shall be killed’ in the Code of Hammurabi is unusual.

3. Fully refuted by wrongly doubted passive of *kuen-* in a NH court deposition (cf. *GrHL*²: 308 without argumentation): KUB 34.45 Ro 11 *UMMA* ^m*Kukkuwa* DUMU.É.GAL DUB.SAR ^m*Tapanunaš-kan kuwapi kunati n[u]za ŪL šer ešun* ‘Thus spoke K., palace official (and) scribe: “When T. was killed, I was not up (there)”’ (thus Werner 1967:53 with doubts). NH composition assured, since deposition is short-term, single copy type document (van den Hout 2006:232). Yet *kunati* **cannot** be a NH creation, since NH Pret3Person verbs lacked final *-i*, and contemporary 3Person passives had only *-tta-* endings: a NH form could only have been **kuntat* or **kuennattat* (see in full Melchert 2025). Neu (1968:102) correctly argues for a colloquialism, but isolated use surely due to compulsion: condition of found corpse precluded use of the circumlocution known from the OH/OS ms. of the Laws: *INA QATI DINGIR-LIM ākkiš* ‘died in/by the hand of a god’ (KBo 6.2 iv 3, Laws §75). Thus a bare agentless *kunati* ‘s/he was killed’ would have been a useful set expression passed down by generations of speakers subject to interrogation by authorities.

B. See for NH evidence for use of the instrumental of agent in OH Melchert 2016a: 240–41.

III. Invalid Alleged Archaism in NS Copy of OH Text

A. Contra *CHD L-N*:56b and *GrHL*¹:314 §22.8, 344 §26.17, use of the imperative with prohibitive *lē* **solely** in the NS copy KUB 1.16 has no chance of being a real usage of any period (OS *lē-ta nāhi* is **not** an example, as per *GrHL*¹:344).

(1) Only *lē* + Present Indicative is real: OH/OS 10x, OH/NS 53x (including 10x in KUB 1.16!), MH/MS 60x, NH compositions 350+. Errors occur also in NH: KBo 5.9 i 30 has *e-eš-du* for correct *e-eš-ta*; KUB 5.4+18.53 (oracular inquiry!) has 2x *taruppantaru* for correct *taruppantari* plus one corrected example in i 3. Contra *CHD L-N*:232b, the Imv3Pl is clearly erroneous. One must read all instances as Pres3Pl (with Beal 2003). For explicit discussion see notes 2 and 9 in the online transliteration: https://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/TLHdig/tlh_xtx.php?d=KUB%205.4. Some errors may be motivated by visually close Imv3Pers forms (also *lē memiškandu* in KUB 1.16 ii 60!), but not all. The point is that erroneous use of imperatives for indicatives is nothing unusual or significant. Such use in the quite unreliable NS copy KUB 1.16 carries no weight.

(2) The alleged examples *kušduwāta lē handān-pat ešdu* and *[k]ušduwāta lē lē handān-pat ešdu* in KUB 1.16 ii 51 and 53 are likely not errors at all, but should be parsed as instances of *lē* in nominal sentences (for which see *GrHL*²:345 §26.21) and a regular imperative: ‘Let there be no slanderings, no! Let (it) continue to be conformed to! (the king’s word in ii 49).

(3) The trajectory of usage in Luwian is clear and supports the Hittite. The statement in Melchert 2003:206 for CLuwian is highly misleading: we find *nīš* + PresInd 9x in six texts (3x in MS) vs. 1x *nī* + Imv in KBo 13.260 iii 34, following 18(!) Imv3Person clauses. The latter in a NS copy is not solid evidence for a real usage. Evidence from HLuwian of the Empire period is predictably sparse, but the EMIRGAZI altars §§7–9 show three examples of /ni:s/ plus indicative followed by a positive imperative in §§12 and 14 (Hawkins 2024:20), matching Hittite. We find consistent /ni:s/ or /ni:/ with the present indicative also throughout Iron Age Luwian, until the late 8thC, where **beside** continued use of the indicative we find exactly three examples with the imperative: KARABURN §13 /ni: manuḫa putu/ (after positive Imv3Sg /sa:tu/ in §12!), SULTANHAN §42 /ni: a:stu/ beside indicative in /ni: panuwa:i/ in §36, ASSUR letter 3 §13 /ni: arḫa sa:tu/ beside

indicative /ni: manuḫa arḫa p(a)ra:i/ in §12 and throughout the ASSUR letters (all texts in Hawkins 2000 or 2024). In our 5th-4thC Lycian texts we meet only *ni* or reinforced *nipe* plus imperative.

B. Contra Jasanoff (2012:125–26) it is quite uncertain that Imv2Sg *e-iš-ši* represents a renewed NS variant of an OH **i-iš-ši*. Given the OH/OS Imv2Pl *ište[n]* in Laws §55, the OH Imv2Sg was more likely **iš* without the stem-vowel *-a-*.

IV. Examples of NS Copies Preserving Correct OH/MH⁷ vs. Erroneous Text in MS Copies

A. In KUB 17.10 (OH/MS, Myth of Disappearance & Return of Telipinu)

The MS copy in two passages is clearly corrupt, with correct text available only in NS(!) copies of other versions. Pace Hoffner (1998:16) and Pecchioli Daddi and Polvani (1990:81), the text of 17.10 ii 30–31 ^{GIŠ}*šāhiš* ^{GIŠ}*ha-ap-pu-ri-ya-ša-aš ha-an-ti-iš ēštu* cannot be sensibly parsed. We must substitute that of KUB 33.8 iii 18–19 (CTH 324, OH/NS): ^{GIŠ}*šāhiš* ^{GIŠ}*happ[uriyašša] šaša-tiš nu=za=kan šēški* ‘The š.-wood and ḫ.-wood are your bed. Lie down on it!’ (the use of the reflexive in the last clause may or may not have been in the OH).

Likewise, pace Hoffner (1998:17–18) and Pecchioli Daddi and Polvani (1999:83), no coherent sense can be made of 17.10 iv 22–24: *GUNNI kalmin tarnas ANA TÜR andan UDU.ḪI.A tarnas INA É.GU₄ andan GU₄.ḪI.A tarnas*. Neither the log, the sheep, nor the cattle were seized in the first place, so they **cannot** be ‘released’. The more accurate text is KUB 33.19 iii 2–7 (CTH 327, OH/NS, Disappearance and Return of the Personal Storm-god of Ḫarapšili: [^{GIŠ}A]B₂ya kammaras tarn[aš É-er tuḫḫuwaiš t]arnas ZAG.GAR.RA-aš ḫanda[tt]at [šerr=aššan DINGIR.M]EŠ ḫantandati § [GUNNI=ma ḫanda]tta<t> šerr=aššan ^{GIŠ}kalmiyēš [ḫantan]tat ^Éḫili=kan anda UDU.ḪI.A ḫantantati [INA É G]U₄=ma anda GU₄.ḪI.A ḫantantati ‘The mist left the windows. [The smoke] left [the house]. The altar was put in order, [and also on it the god]s were put in order. [The hearth was put] in order, and also on it the burning logs were put [in order.] In the fold the sheep were put in order, and in the cor[ral] the cattle were put in order’. For restorations, after **the opening of the myth**, and correct contextual sense of *ḫandāi-* see Melchert 2016b:215–16. The key point is that only things seized are released. Everything *wiṣuriya*-ed is properly *ḫandāi*-ed.

B. In KBo 39.8 (MH⁷/MS, Ritual of Maštigga)

This ms. has been treated as contemporary with date of composition and evidence for MH grammar (e.g., Sideltsev 2020:183). Such MS evidence for features typical in the diction of rituals is an urgent desideratum. Unfortunately, KBo 39.8 is clearly a copy. It does uniquely preserve some archaisms, but also has many innovations and errors, for some of which NS copies have the older forms of the archetypes (for one or two ritual clients). I cite here two egregious examples.

KBo 39.8 ii 36–37 reads SAG.ḪI.A-aš(š)maš tueggaš ḫūmandāš tarpalliš UDU GE₆ KA_xU-i EME-an ḫūrtaušša EGIR-an vs. correct NS KBo 2.3+ i 48–50 SAG.D[U.MEŠ_w]ašmaš NÍ.TE-aš [ḫ]ūmand[a]š tarpalliš UDU GE₆ K[A_xU-i] EME-i [ḫ]ūrtiyašša EGIR¹-an ‘For your persons, for all your limbs the substitute is a black sheep, for the mouth, tongue and the curses afterwards?’. Given the *ša* ‘and’ in **both** mss., only D-LPl for ‘curses’ matching the two preceding D-LSg with which it is coordinated makes sense, contra Miller 2004:75, whatever the sense of *āppan*.

KBo 39.8 iii 17–18 has [pa]rā=war=an=kan [allapahte]n apel UD-aš ḫurtiyaš, with a faulty proleptic pronoun and erroneous D-LPl for the direct object, vs. correct *parā=wa=kan allapahten apel* UD.KAM-aš ḫurtauš ‘you have spit out the curses of that day’ in NS KBo 44.19 ii 15–16. Miller’s attempt (2004:85) to justify ‘you have spit it out (i.e., the tongue) of the curses of that day’ cannot rescue the error of the false proleptic pronoun. Broken context precludes definitive

restoration in NS KBo 9.106 ii 32–33 with clause-final EME-*an* and **no** proleptic pronoun(!), but ‘tongue of the curse(s)’ makes no sense. We expect at best ‘curse(s) of the tongue’.

How can a MS copy of a supposed MH composition have so many innovations, unreal scribal creations, and errors? We know that MH (aka Early New Kingdom) was a period of rapid language change. I would now attribute the changes outlined in Melchert 2008 to the period from Tuthaliya I through Šuppiluliuma I. The (quasi-)Luwian syntax of some incantations (word order and inconsistent use of proleptic pronouns), problematizes composition before Tuthaliya I. My suggestion that Tuthaliya I may have spoken OH just as Šuppiluliuma I, who founded the Hittite Empire, spoke MH is a mere possibility. But I must agree with Miller (2004:89) that space and context require restoring [*n=a*]*pa* in KBo 9.106 ii 47. Absence of *-ap(a)* in MH/MS historical texts may be due to chance (cf. *GrHL*²:480 §28.58), but its use in the ritual of Maštigga surely means that the composition is at least very early MH, and a scribe copying it even one or two generations later might be expected to have difficulty in matching the grammar of the archetype(s).

Appendix 1

The preceding reflects a fresh survey of archaisms and innovations (including unreal creations and errors) in KUB 1.16 (OH/NS), KUB 17.10 (OH/MS) and KBo 39.8 (MH²/MS). The full results with line references are available upon request. I offer here only a few selected illustrations:

Archaisms in KUB 1.16: deletion of *-n* before *-m* at clitic boundary 5x; particle *=(a)pa* 2x; *apē* NPIC, *n=e* N-APInt, *še* DSg 3x beside *nu=šši*, *ūg=a* & *šumeš=a* (as subject); correct use of enclitic possessives passim (cf. conditioned exception below); *šalla* N-APInt 2x, *r/n-* N-API without *-r* 4x; correct allative 3x; transitive mediopassives *paḥḥašdumat*, *paḥḥašta* (Pres2Sg beside Imv2Sg *paḥši*!), *ḥattantaru*; correct “split genitive” 1x; *takku*; *natta*.

Innovations and Unreal/Erroneous Forms in KUB 1.16: NPIC in *-uš*; *kāšma* for OH *kāšatta*; *kueti* (blend of OH/OS *kueši* and NH *kuenti*); *ieni ḥuḥḥa=man* [^mxxx *ud*]*dār=šet* (*ieni* = failed update of OH *ini* with NH *eni*; *-n* deletion in ASgC causes false enclitic possessives in GSg of just *=mi/a-*).

Archaisms in KUB 17.10: many archaic plene spellings (*māḥḥan*, *pāḥḥur*, *šēr*, *tēt/tēzzi*); particle *-an* in *anda=(a)d=an*; *n=ē* NPIC 2x; multiple correct enclitic possessives; GIŠ.ḪI.A-*ru* ‘trees’ (thus N-APInt with zero-ending); KUR-*ya* D-LSg, É-*erza*, *pargamuš* & *āššamu[š]*; *ḥuēzta* (Pres2Sg transitive mediopassive without *-i-* of 3Person beside Imv2Sg *ḥuetti*!), *šāḥ* Imv2Sg (vs. restored *šan(a)ḥ*); ^d*Telipinuwaš peran* (genitive with postposition).

Innovations and Unreal/Erroneous Forms in KUB 17.10:

kāšma for OH *kāšatta*; *tueggaz=šet* (false vocalism vs. OH and very aberrant plene in enclitic!); *uwantiwantaz* (comitative abl. for OH inst.); hypercorrect and unreal GÜB-*lit* *ḥuinut* for correct GÜB-*laz* in multiple NS parallels; for *ḥark-* ‘perish’ new *ḥarkianzi* beside old *ḥarkueni*), active *ḥuettiyat* for OH mediopassive *ḥuettiyati*; *tuḥšanzi* (hypercorrect spelling for *tuḥšanza*, NSgC participle; cf. Melchert 2016b: 211–12); MH TÜR *anda* beside OH INA É.GU₄ *andan*.

Archaisms in KBo 39.8:

nu=uš (2x beside *n=aš* 7x; vs. NS KBo 2.3+ only *nu=uš* 5x in preserved text); *karuwiliēš* correct NPIC; ^dUTU-*i* ± *išḥāmi* (vocative); correct instrumentals 3x; *warši* Pres3Sg; *ḥa[šš]ikkedumat* (old pluractional stem of *ḥann(a)-*!); *tuwarnattaru* 2x (correct passive, surely from archetype, vs. false active *duwarnadu* in KBo 2.3+ & all NS copies!); *tuḥ^{uh}šari* & *tuḥ^{uh}šaru* ii 13 (archaic transitive

mediopassive [pace Miller 2004: 71, et al.], because 39.8 uses for passive *tuhḫuštat* with *-tta-* ending, likely also from archetype); ^{TUG}*šeknuwaš kattān* (vs. faulty ^{TUG}*še[kn]uš* in NS KBo 2.3+).

Innovations and Unreal/Erroneous Forms in KBo 39.8:

Particle *škan* with *šer ēpp-* and *šer arḫa waḫnu-* (vs. surely older *ššān* 2x in NS KBo 2.3+, but latter also has 1x *škan*); faulty GSg *apedaš* UD-*aš* beside correct *apēl* UD-*aš* (both multiple times); *ḫurtāuš* NPIC (vs. old *ḫurdāēš* in NS KBo 2.3+!); *duwarnai* (beside old *duwarnizzi*), *tuh^{uh}šandu* (beside *tuh^{uh}šaru* above), only *ūnnanzi* 3x (vs. *ūnniyanzi* in multiple NS copies!); abl. used for inst. (3x); paragraph-initial *nu* EGIR-*anda* 1x beside correct EGIR-*anda=ma* 3x.

Appendix 2

1. “Precocious” Innovations in OH/OS (illustrative, not claimed to be exhaustive):

(1) Yoshida (1990) demonstrated beyond doubt that Pres3Person mediopassives with root or suffixal accent regularly lack *-ri*. However we do find Pres3Sg *kīšari* in KBo 3.22:22 and 49 and KBo 17.1 iv 9 beside expected OS *kīša* elsewhere; also Pres3Sg *tuhšari* in KUB 29.29 ii 4''' and 5''' beside OS *tuh^{uh}-ša* and *tuhša*; and once *[a]randari* in KBo 17.6 ii 15 beside multiple OS Pres3Pl *-anta*.

(2) The spread of the regular Pres3Sg ending *-āi* of monosyllabic *ḫi*-verbs to **root- or suffix-accented** di- and trisyllabic stems is essentially a NH innovation (I have found none in the assured MH/MS corpus), but in KBo 17.43 i 11 we find a cluster *ḫuttiannāi tarnāi ḫalziššāi* and in i 3 again *ḫuttiannāi* beside expected *tarnai*. These are not justification for doubting that KBo 17.43 is OH/OS. We also find multiple exceptions in KBo 25.20+, whose status as OS or MS is debated (see the online Konkordanz and Goedegebuure 2014:13). These suggest that the total absence of examples in our MH/MS corpus may be due to its limited size. For the need to define this change as given see *GrHL*²:244 §11.18.

2. Archaisms in Assured New Hittite Compositions **Not** Credibly Definable as Set Expressions (illustrative, not claimed to be exhaustive):

(1) KBo 15.52 is a NS copy of the *ḫišuwa*-festival, probably a MH composition, (Neu 1997:460), but the **colophon** in vi 39–45 can hardly be counted as anything but a NH composition: MUNUS.LUGAL ^f*Puduḫepaškan kuwapi* ^mUR.MAḫ-LÚ-*in* GAL DUB.SAR.MEŠ ^{URU}*Ḫattuši ANA TUPPA*^{HLA} ^{URU}*Kizzuwatna šanḫūwanzi weriyat n=asta kē TUPPA*^{HLA} Š[A E]ZEN₄ *ḫišuwāš apiya UD-at a[rḫ]a aniyat* ‘When Queen Puduḫepa summoned Walwazidi, Chief of the Scribes, to seek in Ḫattuša the tablets of Kizzuwatna, he copied out on that day these tablets of the *ḫi*-festival’. It is arguable that the archaic OH expression for ‘on that day’ with attributive use of *apiya* and endless locative *šiwat* even occurred in the *ḫišuwa*-festival texts. In any case, the NH scribe ^mLAMMA-DINGIR-LIM used it in a wholly spontaneous fashion for standard *apēdani* UD-*ti*.

(2) Once one removes examples from texts of Šuppiluliuma I, whose language was certainly still MH (see Neu 1979:82–84), most instances of use of the instrumental in NH compositions may be fairly defined as recurrent expressions, as suggested in Melchert 1977:371–75. However, this is hardly accurate for the use in the prayer of Muwattalli to the Storm-god of Kummani, KBo 11.1 Ro 42: *nu=mu* [DI]NGIR-LIM *kūn memian tešḫit parkunut* ‘May you, the god, clarify this matter for me through a dream!’. The sense ‘clarify’ is unique and very unlikely to be based on prior models, and the alternation of *tešḫit* with *tešḫaz* in the plague prayers of Muršili belies the implication that NH use of *tešḫit* is lexically determined (Melchert 1977:371).

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