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76) קַתְּוִיל, ḫtl, huttulli? — Quite surprisingly, Benjamin J. Noonan’s excellent *Non-Semitic Loanwords in the Hebrew Bible* (2019) includes a few words that are presented as “direct loans” from Hittite into Hebrew. The surprise is due to the obvious unlikelihood of any historical contacts between the kingdom of Hatti and the culture(s) that will eventually write Biblical Hebrew without the intermediation of Syrian, Levantine or Mesopotamian civilizations that would help the alleged connections survive the significant chronological gap (Hittite was most certainly dead already by the mid or late XII century, and any late local survivals of unattested varieties had very little chance to project long distance influences).

While linguists are often, and understandably, enthusiast about formal matches that allow the proposal of connections, it does not take much more than a very general glance over the history of the Ancient Near East to find the idea of Hittite words “directly” entering into Hebrew (or any other geographically distant Iron Age languages) extremely suspicious.

One of the words that, with Noonan’s abbreviations, is marked as: “[D] Hitt → Heb” is the substantive קַתְּוִיל, for which, on the Hebrew side, only one occurrence in Ezekiel 30.21 is available, where the word indicates a “splint” or “bandage”, in the context of an elaborate metaphor uttered by the Hebrew god. According to Noonan (p. 307), the source would be the Hittite word *huttulli*, “wool(flake)” (*Hethitisches Wörterbuch* 2, Bd. III/2, p. 792; Alwin Kloekhorst, *Etymological Dictionary of the Hittite Language*, Leiden, 2008, p. 351), a suggestion that, indeed, goes back to the seminal work by Chaim Rabin (“Hittite words in Hebrew”, *Or* 32, 1963, pp. 113-139).

Now, while the Hittite occurrences do seem to point to a larger set of meanings (“wool flake”, “wool strand”, simply “wool”), the slightly different semantics does not prevent a connection, as changes in meanings are by no means impossible even for technical terms; a bit less satisfactory is the fact that such a generic word was borrowed in a specific meaning (“medical bandage”) which is unknown for the alleged model word.

In any case, the (limited) panorama of the occurrences does not provide any serious reason to doubt that a borrowing took place. The issue that remains to be tackled is, therefore, the historical implausibility of the borrowing. The problem, of course, is easily solved by a more precise assessment of the sources in other languages of the Ancient Near East. In Ugaritic, the word *ḫtl* is in fact attested, with the meaning “swaddle band” (Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, Leiden, 2015, p. 341; Wilfred G.E. Watson, “Terms for Textiles, Clothing, Hides, Wool and Accessories in Ugaritic: An Etymological Study”, *AuOr* 36/2, 2018, pp. 359-396). This Ugaritic word, apart from being a much better candidate for direct borrowing into Hebrew than a Hittite one could ever be, has also a meaning that appears semantically much closer to that of קַתְּוִיל. It is absolutely possible that the three words, קַתְּוִיל, *ḫtl*, and *huttulli*, belong together, as it is also possible that the similarity of the Hittite form is accidental. In either case, the direct source of the Hebrew form should certainly be Ugaritic *ḫtl*.

Note

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77) Nouveaux fragments de cunéiforme louvite III — Cette note brève présente cinq nouveaux fragments de cunéiforme louvite, incluant une nouvelle édition et un commentaire pour chacun.