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It was a remarkable fact that, as a religious student, he was guided and that not even Muhammad...

Amnon Altman’s book concludes the long research work that the scholar has carried out over many years. Partial results had already appeared in articles listed in the literature at the end of the volume. In his book Altman has examined the international Hittite treaties in order to understand the real meaning as well as the function of the historical prologue.

The volume is divided into fifteen chapters. In the first chapter the Author examines the hypotheses that are traditionally given by scholars to the meaning of the historical prologues of the treaties. In the second chapter a preliminary categorization of the historical prologues is laid out whilst in the third chapter there is an overview of the political history of the Hittite kingdom which is the framework within which the treaties are placed. The next eleven chapters examine in detail the historical prologues of the treaties which are presented according to the classification outlined in the second chapter. The last chapter draws the conclusions to the work and the book ends with the bibliography and indices.

As already stated, in the first chapter the Author examines the traditional view of the treaties’ historical prologues. It is his intention to refute the hypothesis of attributing a predominantly political function to these introductions, which are generally seen as messages addressed to the sovereign with whom the treaty was stipulated and to the court of Hatti. In order to do this, Altman quotes some examples of historical prologues that, in his opinion, cannot have that particular function since they contain misleading wording, inaccurate statements and falsehoods etc.

In my opinion, the examples taken into consideration do not succeed in upholding A. Altman’s axiom. I will give one example regarding the treaty prologue with Alakšandu. The Author notes that: “the main argument of this prologue is that from the days of the Hittite king Labarna (II) until at least the days of Sippiluliuma I, including the reign of Tutḫaliya (I/II), the land of Wiluša maintained peaceful relations with the Hittites,…. However, in a fragment of his own annals (CTH 142.2), Tutḫaliya (I/II) himself tells us that the land of Wilušiya was part of a coalition of countries that initiated hostilities against him (ii 19)…. Now, the vassal and his people surely knew the true facts. What purpose then, could such misleading formulations or falsehoods have served in being addressed to them?” (page 32).

In reality, Muwattallī II, in the historical prologue of the treaty with Alakšandu makes no false assertion. He only says that there was a time when Wiluša rebelled against the Hittites, but that this had happened in the past, so long before
that it was lost in memory and that not even Muwattalli remembers under which Hittite sovereign this took place. Furthermore, in my opinion, nothing explicitly demonstrates that Tuthaliya, mentioned in the §2 (lines 9-14), is the king who conquered Aššuwa. As a matter of fact, it would seem more likely that it is his successor, Tuthaliya III, who did not actually fight against Wiluša. This is shown by the fact that the sovereign mentioned immediately after is Suppiluliuma I. Therefore, in my opinion, the episode of war that Muwat-talli II relegates to a time in the distant and forgotten past refers to the attack launched by Tuthaliya II/III against Wiluša. This presentation made by Muwatalli II, on the other hand, shows that the introduction to the treaty has a political significance. In the example in question, it intends to emphasize the friendship which linked Hatti and Wiluša, without explicitly denying what was common knowledge. A good relationship with the countries in western Anatolia was important for Muwatalli II in a period when the Hittites had to face Aḫḫiyawaya and Piyamaradu in the west (as shown by the well-known letter of Manapa-Tarḫunta) while in Syria, the political situation was boiling.¹

The presentation of past history given in the introduction of the treaties, destined for the court of the other country (and, perhaps, also to the gods, as A. Altman suggests in pages 32-33), is a way to re-map the past in the light of the present day; as observed by C. Zaccagnini, in the historical prologue “the other party learns what happened to him, to his fathers and forefathers, in the same way as he learns what his future obligations will be”.²

This is where we get to the central theme of A. Altman’s volume. The author believes that the function of the historical prologue is not political, but legal: “the function of the historical prologue is to present an argument or a set of arguments with a legal message, justifying the imposition of obligations on the second party, and depriving that party of the ability to contest the validity or legality of the treaty” (page 472). This is undoubtedly partly true although this assertion can with difficulty be extended to all of the documentation available and above all, in my opinion, it must not become the sole approach to understanding the historical prologues of the treaties.

It is surprising that while Altman wishes to demonstrate the weak points in the traditional view of the political significance of the historical prologue, he does not quote in his bibliography, nor does he refer to, fundamental works like the volume Prestige and Interest by M. Liverani³ or the article by C. Zaccagnini quoted beforehand.

By attributing to the historical prologue the goal of legally justifying the clauses imposed by the Hittite king only to those sovereigns beneath him, A. Altman comes up against the difficulty represented by the historical prologue of the parity treaty between Hatti and Egypt. The Author states that the historical introduction of this treaty does not possess the character of a historical prologue, without being able to provide convincing proof in support of such an assertion (see pages 47, 473-478). At the same time the Author gives no

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¹ See St. de Martino, L’Anatolia occidentale nel Medio Regno ittito, Firenze 1986 (EOThEN 5), 33-38.
³ Prestige and Interest. International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600-1100 B.C., Padova 1990.
In order to demonstrate the validity of his hypothesis, A. Altman analyses the historical prologue of a series of treaties. He dedicated particular attention to the study of the two versions of the treaty stipulated between Suppiluliuma I and Sattiwa of Mittani. Here, the Author abandons the traditional classification of the Hittite treaties into three great categories: parity treaties, unbalanced treaties and the so-called protectorate treaties, in favour of a more articulated classification, to be discussed later. Starting out with such a strongly classified analysis of the treaties on a formal basis, A. Altman finds himself in some difficulty when it comes to explaining the double and different version of Suppiluliuma I’s and Sattiwa’s treaty. Due to the formal differences that Sattiwa’s treaty with Suppiluliuma presents, A. Altman states that the latter is not a treaty but a “binding document” (page 297). Furthermore, he writes that “one of the reasons for the drafting of CTH 52 was to make Sattiwa undertake a more binding commitment than that of the regular oath taken by the vassal kings. This, in turn, may be understood, on the one hand, by the long history of enmity between the two powers, but on the other, it may indicate suspicions that Sattiwa may have aroused in the Hittite court.” (pages 299-300). Therefore, A. Altman believes that the Hittites imposed a sort of personal oath-making onto Sattiwa, a part from the regular treaty, since they did not fully trust him. However, what we actually know about the reality of the period would point to a different version of the facts. It would seem very probable that Suppiluliuma I had welcomed and helped Sattiwa as a move against the Assyrians, thereby linking himself to an ally that was politically very important. Therefore, he would have wished to recognise him a privileged status, according him the honour of a treaty that was, essentially, an unbalanced treaty, although formally appearing similar to a parity treaty (that is a protectorate treaty). In this way, the Hittite king would have wanted neither to humiliate the new king of Mittani nor the court of this country.

As I have already said, A. Altman suggests a new classification of the treaties instead of the older, traditional classification. On the basis of formal and content analysis of the historical prologues of the treaties the Author suggests three categories of treaties: “Constitutive Treaties”, “Follow-up Treaties” and “Modificative Treaties”. The first ones, in turn, can be divided into “Grant treaties” and “Subjugation treaties”. In the first case the grantee had no previous title or rights to the throne. It seems to me that such terminology is, to a certain extent, equivocal because those sovereigns who were also bound by grant treaties were subordinate to the Hittites through a subjugation treaty.

The second and the third group, the “Follow-up and Modificative Treaties” include, respectively, treaties which reaffirm the sovereignty of a king and treaties that are stipulated after insubordination and which, therefore, contain modifications in clauses. In my opinion, the terminology used can once again be the cause of some confusion. The treaty with Kurunta, introducing substantial modifications in the clauses

4) As D.J. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, Rome 1981, 74, had already noted.
(in the definition of borders), appears in the “Follow-up Treaties”. On the other hand, the treaty with Šaušgamuwa (whose clauses, as A. Altman also recognises, page 443, present no great changes) is in the “Modificative Treaties” because in the historical prologue the previous revolt of Amurru is underlined.

In conclusion, while it can certainly be recognised that the historical prologue could have, at times, a legal significance (above all where it was necessary to justify the break-up of previous agreements), I continue to believe, notwithstanding the Author’s careful and accurate work, that it had a mainly political objective.

It does not yet clearly appear, however, what was the deeper ideological significance of this part of the treaties. Perhaps this significance has to be looked for in the more general context regarding the value the Hittites gave to history-writing. Recently, M. Forlanini(6) observed that the “passion” that the Hittites held for history could have been determined by the fact that, since they possessed no common linguistic and ethnic identity, they were able to recognise themselves only in the historical development of their country and in the written presentations that were made in reference to such development. In the light of M. Forlanini’s brilliant piece of intuition I wonder whether the Hittites did not attribute to the historical prologue of the treaties the actual significance and function of tracing common lines which bound them to the other country with whom the treaty was stipulated. The kings of Hatti, therefore, in an attempt to trace a common history with them and every allied or subordinate country (independently of the fact of whether this shared history was presented according to the political conveniences of the time) would have wanted to establish a close ideological link with people of different traditions, culture and languages, which merely a relatively recent past (made of peace, war, betrayal, collaboration etc.) was all they had in common.

Notwithstanding certain differences of opinion, one must recognise the fact that A. Altman has been capable of producing an attentive and deep-reaching analysis of a formidable amount of documentation that is extremely important for the re-construction of the Hittite political history and of the ideology of power.