



This intricate architecture adorns the side of an ornate Hittite temple. Here a guide points to a lion head surrounded by stylized foliage above a border of swastikas. The Hittites were a tolerant polytheistic nation and boasted of having 1,000 gods—many adopted from neighboring and subject peoples. The Hittites recognized equality between men and women and gave rights to slaves. No other legal system in the world at that time was so humane. At a time when brutal treatment of enemy prisoners was customary, the Hittites were compassionate and civilized, even by today's standards. Some believe the Hittites were the first people to craft objects in iron.

Who Were the Hittites?

A great Indo-European civilization ruled Anatolia (in Asia Minor) for centuries, and it spread all the way to northern Syria. But this great Aryan civilization was virtually forgotten for three millennia, until rediscovered in the 1800s. . . .

BY WILLIAM WHITE

During the great migration of the Indo-European peoples off of the Central Asian plains, a branch of the Indo-Iranian family shot out into Anatolia—modern Turkey—and founded an empire that would last a millennium, and which would profoundly reflect both the Nordo-Germanic culture of which it was a part, and influence the development of Classical Greek, and thus Western, civilization. Yet the culture of the Hittites was buried for millennia in the mountains of what today is central Turkey.

Even after it was discovered, it has been the subject of intense debate, with scholars intent on deconstructing the Indo-European migration hypothesis making it, like the more obscure-to-the-man-in-the-street Hurrians, the target of intense criticism and attacks.

Yet the Hittites were certainly an Indo-European people, distantly tied to the Indo-Iranian language group, and, thus, the Nordic/Germanic culture, as their



Above, a rock relief at Yazlikaya shows Hittite King Tudhaliya IV embraced in the left arm of a god, either Teshub or Sarruma. The god holds a smaller figure in his right hand. The god wears a high, pointed cap while the king is hard to make out, due to erosion. Tudhaliya is credited with giving the rock-cut chambers at Yazlikaya their final shape. On the cover this issue, two Hittite statues reveal their physiognomy as Aryan. On the lower right is a small portion of the great Lion Gate that allowed entrance into the Hittite capital of Hattusa. See page 21 for an aerial view of the ruins of Hattusa.

language, religion and culture clearly show. [Hittite is the oldest Indo-European language for which we have records—older even than Sanskrit. Its nearest linguistic relatives, all comprising the Anatolian subfamily of languages, include Palaic, Lydian, Luwian and Lycian, all extinct now.—Ed.]

Hittite history is divided, roughly, into three periods—the Old Kingdom, the interregnum, or Hurrian occupation, and the “New Empire,” or just “Imperial,” period. The Old Kingdom begins in approximately the 18th century B.C., but the Hittites are believed to have entered Asia Minor beforehand (whether by sea, via the Hellespont, or over the Caucasus Mountains is unclear). Two other Indo-European peoples, the Luwians and the people of Pala, entered at the same time, and the differences that developed among their languages has caused the extrapolation that all three must have been in Asia Minor at least 400 years before their languages are known in written form. [The Hurrian, Hattic and Urartean languages are related to the northeast Caucasian languages, according to some scholars.—Ed.]

It is believed the Luwian people entered Asia Minor over the Hellespont from the Balkans. Early Anatolian culture, pre-Hittite Old Kingdom, has produced artifacts, including copper bull statues, that appear to be

derivative or part of “kurgan culture,” which was the culture of the Aryans on the Eurasian steppes. Tracing these artifacts has caused some archeologists to believe the Luwians conquered the city of Troy, renaming it Ilios, and initially spread along the west coast of Asia Minor into the south, either adopting or founding the culture of Minoan Crete.

This would be in accordance with the Greek mythical history of Teucer (Teucus or Teucris, son of King Telamon of Salamis Island), but there are issues with it—particularly the fact that Minoan culture, prior to the Mykenaeen conquest, does not appear to have been Indo-European. Further, if this was the case, then the Luwians adopted the cult of the Great Mother Goddess, discussed below, which was definitely not Indo-European in form. Arguing somewhat in favor of this interpretation is the known relationship between the culture of the Etruscans and the cultures of western Asia Minor, and the fact that one version of the Etruscan migration myth, that given in Herodotus, claiming descent from the Lydians, is a proto-version of the Germanic migration myth known in Jordanes, *The Swabian Chronicle*, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Saxo Grammaticus and others (and detailed by Viktor Rydberg in his *Teutonic Mythology*).

Prior to the Hittite Old Kingdom, a dynasty arose at



Hittite chariots were solid wooden machines, drawn by two horses and capable of carrying three or more men. There was a driver and a “mounted” fighter, while the other man (or men) was a “runner” who would dismount and provide support on foot at the battlefield. The armor, if any, was light, consisting of scale armor and a helmet at most. The fighting crewman used sometimes a bow, as seen here, a long spear, javelins and a sword. It is debated whether or not Hittite chariots were less maneuverable than Egyptian ones, but they were heavier and hence slower than the Egyptian ones, which were made of rattan. Under Emperor Muwatallis II, c1320-1294 B.C., a struggle for domination of Syria led to one of the greatest battles of ancient times, at Kadesh on the Orontes, in the early 13th century B.C. Pharaoh Ramesses later claimed it was a great victory, but most historians believe it was at best a pyrrhic one for Egypt, while it led to an expansion of the Hittite empire southward. Sixteen years later the Egyptians signed a treaty with their powerful Indo-European neighbors—the first peace treaty in recorded history.

Hattusa or Kattusa (17th century B.C.), and this dynasty is known to the modern world primarily through its contact with Assyrian merchants, who appear to have dominated the trade of this kingdom—and whose rights were asserted and protected by the early Assyrian emperors. Whether this northern Anatolian kingdom is Hittite, though, has been the subject of some debate, and it is generally excluded from the formally recognized Hittite kingdoms and empires.

The Hittites, who called themselves the “Neshites” [or Nesili, “pertaining to the city of Nesa”—Ed.] expanded from Hattusa and absorbed the culture of a people that preceded them, the Hattians, or Hatti people, from which the name “Hittite” is derived. They also completely exterminated this people—or at least claim to have done so in their histories. [However, Turkish archeologist Ekrem Akurgal claims the Hattians were still the great majority of the population in the Hittite period. The non-Indo-European Hattians appear to have had longer noses than the Hittites.—Ed.]

The identity of the Hatti is unclear, but they appear to have had some relationship to Sumerian culture—though that identification has been challenged, and the evidence either way is murky because so little is known of the Hatti people and their unwritten language. One of the peoples the Hittites displaced, however, appears to be the peoples that were known to the Greeks as the Pelasgians, and who migrated into the Peloponessus perhaps 22 centuries before Christ. The Pelasgians have been identified by some with the Luwians and their kingdom of Arzawa or Azzawa, though this identity is unclear as well. [The Pelasgians may be polyphyletic, and some of them may well be non-Indo-Europeans.—Ed.]

The Hittites faced several major rivals in Asia Minor. One was the cult of the Great Mother, which was centered at Crete, and which profoundly influenced the development of Greek, Roman and Semitic cultures. Like the Hatti, the culture of the Great Mother is obscure, and known to us primarily through its remnants in Greece, and through the influence it had on the worship of Isis, Ishtar, Asherah and its integration with the Indo-European myth of Gaia and the Great Cow. Attempts have been made to link it to the Indo-European Luwians, though its serpent worship and the predominance of the female deity make it non-Indo-European in form. (See TBR, September/October 2001.)



Above, a ceramic depiction of a Hittite rider and horse joined as one entity, an indication of the close relationship Hittite horsemen had with their steeds. Plastic art of pre-imperial Hittite culture is scarce; the art of the late Hittite states shows a composite of motifs and influences with input from Syrian, Assyrian and Egyptian sources. This piece dates from c. 1000 B.C. Below, this finely crafted silver rhyton (drinking cup) depicting the front end of a bull is a magnificent piece of Hittite art from central Anatolia, probably 15th to 13th century B.C. From the Schimmel collection at the New York Metropolitan Museum.



This cult appears to have been a religion of pre-Mykenaeon Minoan Crete, which has been traditionally assigned as a branch of Semitic Phoenician culture, and the cult of the Great Mother may have represented an early subversion of an Aryan people by demonic Semitic gods. This was certainly the case with its derivative, the Etruscans. To the Hittites, the Great Mother was known as Kubaba, likely a term they adopted from the Hurrians during the interregnum, and it is by this name—Graecized and then Latinized into Kybele or “Cybele”—that she was known to the West [although many other female deities, of diverse names, have been subsumed into her identity. For what it is worth, Kubaba is the only queen on the Sumerian king list.—Ed.]

But the first major rivals of the Hittites were their fellow Indo-Europeans, whom the Hittites conquered and absorbed into the Old Kingdom of central, southern and southeastern Anatolia by the early 18th century. They then expanded west and vassalized the kingdom of Arzawa—which, many believe, gave Asia its name—and conducted relations, some scholars argue, with the city of Troy, known to them as “Wilusa,” a form of Ilios.

In the east, the Hittites were competing with the Hurrians, and, eventually, the Indo-European kingdom of Mittani. The rise of the Hurrians seems to have broken the links between the pre-Old-Kingdom Hittites and the Assyrians, and the Hurrians appear to have eventually conquered and established a dynasty in northern Mesopotamia—and possibly the south as well—where Indo-European names come to predominate at several points in different areas during the second millennium B.C. This early rise of the Hurrians likely gave the Hittites the economic freedom from their Semitic merchant colonies that they needed to establish their own cultural identity, and so it is ironic that the force that allowed the growth of the Hittite Old Kingdom eventually conquered it and subjected it to foreign cultural rule.

Like the Hittites, the Hurrians have been the target of intense efforts by Communist and Soviet pseudo-scholars, who have seen them as a weak link in the Indo-European migration theory. The Hurrians appear to be a

people who were conquered and governed by an Armenian Indo-European minority, possibly one that drove them over the Caucasus Mountains and then subjugated them. The Hurrian religious form is firmly Indo-Iranian, and likely a close cognate of the Vedas and Zend Avesta. But the language of the Hurrian people is almost an isolate, related only to Urartian, the language of their successor state, Urartu. However, language isolates and the adoption of the languages of the Near and Middle Eastern masses by the Indo-European invaders are common, and the fact that the language of the Hurrians is only influenced by the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family is nowhere near as decisive as Soviet scholars have made it to be. [Some Russian scholars maintain that Hurrian and Hattic are related to the Northeast Caucasian language.—Ed.]

The Hurrians overran the Hittites in the 16th century, and subjugated them for several decades, until Tudhaliya I [r. 1465-1440] or his son Hattusili II [r. 1440-1425], having overthrown foreign domination in his sub-kingdom of Kizzuwatna [today, southeastern Turkey], was able to lead a revolution against the Hurrian empire and overthrow its dominance, uniting the other vassal kingdoms of the Hittites under him, and eventually creating the Hittite empire, which

expanded to the Aegean in the west and upper Mesopotamia in the south.

An alternative version of this history makes Tudhaliya I of Hurrian descent himself, and one of several Hurrian kings of the fractured Hittite lands, who rose to prominence by uniting the Hurrian kinglets. [Both Kizzuwatna and Mitanni have also been described as Hurrian, although rival kingdoms.—Ed.]

Regardless of his personal origins, his dynasty was certainly heavily intermarried with the Aryan Hurrians, and it is this that is the Hittite empire that confronted the forces of the Pharaoh Akhenaten in the 14th century, and that brought the Apiru—the Hebrews—into what became the kingdoms of Judea and Samaria. It is also this empire that eventually smashed the Indo-European kingdom of the Mittani—a nation whose kings had definite Indo-Iranian names—and blocked the expan-

The Hittites were very progressive in their treatment of women, giving them equal rights under the law. Slaves also had rights.



This gate, the southwest entrance to the upper city of Hattusa, capital city of the Hittite empire, features two matching lions (one now badly eroded) carved into arching stones. Back in their heyday, 1343-1200 B.C., the complete gate formed a parabola, with towers on each side—a magnificent, daunting sight.

sion of the Assyrians to the west for 200 years.

The Hittites battled the forces of Egypt in the 13th and into the 12th century, when an invasion from an unknown source destroyed their empire and fractured it into component ethnic kingdoms—kingdoms that persisted in Anatolia until their conquest by Assyria and/or Persia at various points in the first half of the first millennium before Christ. It is believed by some that their empire was smashed by the Sea Peoples—the victorious Greeks departing from Troy—but the best evidence of that is that the later Assyrian conquerors of Asia Minor describe the defeat of the “Mushki” people—who are believed to be the Mysians, relatives of the Phrygians who were later known to the Greeks.

HITTITE LANGUAGE

The Hittite language was discovered to be definitely Indo-European in the early 20th century, and this identification is the main reason that Soviet and communist

scholars have been unable to deny the Aryan nature of Hittite society. Hittite is largely an absorption of its geographic predecessor, Hattic, and there are eight component tongues that are believed to have influenced its development. The Hittites are the first Indo-European peoples of the c. 2000 B.C. migration to have developed a written language or hieroglyphics, but they largely abandoned this in favor of a variant of Akkadian cuneiform.

However, the method by which the Hittites adopted the Semitic syllabary is revealing, and useful for linguistic analysis of various Semitic languages, such as Hebrew. Semitic syllabary is often in the form of consonant-vowel, or vowel-consonant, though sometimes the vowels stand alone—much like in the phonograms of the Egyptian and Sumerian languages. Thus a name in the Indo-European form of, say, “IOVE,” or Jove, might appear in Semitic transliteration as Ia-ho-va-ah, or “Jehovah”—which is precisely where the Jews and

their forerunners derived the name of the god they call YHWH, or Yahweh (Jehovah).

This has been of particular interest because of the number of references to the peoples and places of the Trojan War that appear in Hittite texts. In the archives of Arnuwandas I appear references to the Ahhiyawas or Ahhiyas, and to an Attarissiyas of Ahhiya who attacked a king of the “mountain land of Zippasala” named Madduwattas. These Ahhiyawas founded the city of Millawanda which, under the reign of Mursilis II, fought with the Hittites. Even later, Ahhiyawa was named, along with Babylon and Assyria, as a great power of the Near East. And a later king of Millawanda has a brother named Tawagalawas, who assists the people of Lukka land (the Lycians) against raiders.

In these records we find the Achaeans under the name of the Ahhiyawa (from a hypothetical form “Achaiwa”), and the city of Miletus under the name of Millawanda. While some have argued that the Achaeans should be Ahhiyawia, and thus could not be the Ahhiyawa, this is the kind of argument that philologists love and no human being can rationally understand—to

accept it, one has to create a second people with almost exactly the same name as the Achaeans, almost the same characteristics, and in almost exactly the same place—an irrationality that is discarded by Occam’s Razor. Some have also argued that Tawagalawas is the Greek Eteocles (Eteoclewes).

Similarly, the issue of whether the city of Taruisa in the land of Uilusiia—Troisha in Wilusa—is Troy, has been debated, but the same problem—the problem of hypothesizing two identical peoples with identical traits and similar names in the same place—arises. That the king of Wilusa in the reign of Muwatallis is Alaksandu—Alexander, or Paris—poses a similar problem. Obviously these ancient Hittite records refer to Troy.

The Hittites also, though, adopted a number of grammatical conventions from the Hatti people who preceded them, particularly the use of the enclitics *assa-* and *nytha-*, which appear in Greece, particularly in place names, and let us definitely establish the link between the people of Asia Minor and the people of the Peloponessus (a name which itself contains the god name Pel-ops (perhaps “fire-eyed,” the Hatti/Pelagian



An image often associated with the Hittites is this type of sphinx (left) with the body of a lion, eagle wings and a human head. Lions were obviously important symbols to the Hittites—and other cultures of the ancient Middle East. Lion sculptures are found at the Hittite sites of Aleppo, Carchemis and Tel Atchana. Above, a dying lion with an arrow sticking out of his shoulder is depicted in this Hittite wall relief.

enclitic “-assa-,” meaning “place of the god,” and the Indo-European nominative “-os”). Some have argued, though, that these Hatti names are actually part of the Indo-European language of the Luwians; and thus the Pelasgians and Anatolians who are known to have entered the Peloponessus, fleeing the Hittite expansion, were Indo-Europeans as well.

This invading culture engaged in bull-worship, and thus may be linked to the kurgan-derived culture of the Luwians, but also, apparently, embraced the worship of the Great Mother, which seemed alien to the later Mykenaeen Greeks. Until the decipherment of Linear A and the discovery of the archives of the peoples the Hittites conquered, the identity of these peoples may remain an open question.

HITTITE RELIGION

Perhaps the strongest evidence that the Hittites were truly of Indo-European origin, though, lies in their religious forms, which are cognate to the story known in the Nordic-Germanic tradition as the epic cycle of the Winter War, and in the Indo-Iranian cycle as the withdrawal of the “smiths.”

Among Indo-European peoples, there is an ur-myth, or original story of the gods, in which the plants and animals of the universe were shaped by a group of divine smiths. These smiths at some point withdrew from the world, and their withdrawal brought about the first winter. In the Indo-Iranian cycle, they become reconciled to the gods. In the Nordic-Germanic cycle, their withdrawal starts the decline of man into the “death age.”

The smiths in the Indo-Iranian cycle are known as the ribhus, but in the Nordic Eddas, they are known as the alfs, or elves. Their leader, Ivaldi, and his sons have a mythical contest with the sons of Sindre—the giant Mimir—and are challenged to produce the greatest treasures for the gods. Loki persuades them to enter into the contest, and unfairly influences it; because of his cheating, the elves demand his head and end up injuring his lip, sewing his mouth shut to stop his lies. But because of the unfair judgment that is passed upon their work, the gods known as Volund or Thiassi, his brother Egil-Orvandil, and their brother Giuki, withdraw into the Wolfdales, where they forge a terrible sword that is destined to slay the god Frey at Ragnarok. Volund is, in many aspects, a storm god, or a god of the

The First Expert On the Hittites

Bedrich Hrozny, born in 1859, was a Czech linguist and professor of Semitic languages at Charles University in Prague. Hrozny studied the Hittite language and determined it to be Indo-European in origin, in 1917. While the idea of an Indo-European origin for Hittite had been



proposed as early as 1902, it had been ridiculed by establishment scholars, who supported a Biblical-Hebraic origin for the civilizations of the world, and opposed the idea of “Indo-European” peoples.

Later in his life, Hrozny attempted to prove that many “lost languages” were related to the Indo-European language family, including the Linear A and B scripts of Crete and the Dravidian languages. While it was later determined, in 1952, that Linear B was an Indo-European language—Greek—written in Minoan characters, Linear A remains undeciphered, and is not believed to be Indo-European in origin, though proponents of this position exist.

Hrozny was forced to stop his work by a heart attack he suffered in 1944, and later died in 1952, aged 93. After his death, the political movement in academia opposed to theories of Indo-European origin grew in strength, receiving significant financing from the Soviet Union, which attacked scientific theories of comparative language, religion and culture as opposed to its political goal of world union, and which promoted “material culture” and “isolated study” as methods of approach to ancient history and prehistory instead.

Had Hrozny bowed to the pressure of those who want to see a common origin of mankind, but do not wish to see it in a Proto-Indo-European people, the Hittite language, whose existence was completely unknown before the 19th century, would still be unintelligible today.

winds and the air—and he is one of the aspects of the multifaceted storm gods that were worshiped by the ancient Norsemen.

Hittite religion has been attacked as non-Indo-European because, in the late period, it was heavily influenced by the Hurrians, who adopted their religion from the Indo-Iranian cycles. Teshub, the storm god of the Hittites from the interregal period onward, is definitely a borrowing from their eastern neighbors, the Hurrians. But there is a cycle of Hittite stories known as “old Hittite myths,” and these involve Telipinu, the “son of the storm god,” who brings about the first winter by withdrawing from the world and ceasing his efforts in the preservation of life and its cycles. This deity, who was perverted in Semitic cultures into the god of resurrection, is likely an early cognate of the storm-god figure that became Volund, and hints at an original unity between the Indo-European storm god and the Near Eastern god of resurrection.

In the Hurrian and post-Hurrian period, there is also a theme that develops which is cognate with a theme found in semi-mythical northern histories. This theme is the brotherhood of the storm and the Sun gods, and their relationships to the Great Mother and the Sun goddesses. In the mythical history of Saxo Grammaticus, for instance, one often finds Halfdan and a figure related to the Indo-European fire god Agni paired—much as Belinus, as a storm god, and Brennus are paired in the history of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Halfdan and Agni relate in many ways to Thor and Heimdal (though it has been argued that Halfdan is the son of Thor, rather than Thor himself, as well as the son of Heimdal—Rydberg discusses this dual-fatherhood extensively in his *Teutonic Mythology*, though it is, in this author’s opinion, one of the weaknesses of Rydberg’s theory). Halfdan and Agni reflect a legendary euhemerization of the dyad of the storm god and the Sun god.

There is also a myth from the Hurrian period of the Great Mother, an adoption of Ishtar, seducing a serpent god, a child of Kumarbi, the prototype of the Greek Cronus, in her garden, and this story may have been a

prototype borrowed by the Hebrews in their story of the seduction of Eve by the serpent. Similarly, there is a rock-god created by Kumarbi to destroy Teshub, the storm god, which resembles the story of Morkkalfir in the Eddas, and of the giant with the feet of clay in the Bible.

The Hurrian period is most notable, though, for the character of Kumarbi himself, who castrates his father and then eats the children of Anu in order to prevent their usurpation of his throne, and thus inspired the stories of Cronus, Uranus, Rhea and the birth of Zeus.

In the Hittite imperial period, the Hittite religion was heavily influenced by Egypt, and the Sun god came to supplant the storm god as the central deity of the religion. The Hittite emperor, at this time, adopted the title of “son of the Sun” and altered his name in Hittite writing to reflect the Egyptian style of displaying the Sun in the king’s royal name. Very late Hittite religious writings show an even heavier syncretization with Egyptian myth.

At a time in the Near East when flaying and impaling enemies was the rule, the Hittites were humane & civilized.

CONCLUSION

The Hittites were an Indo-European people who achieved pre-eminence among the Indo-European invaders of Asia Minor and founded an empire that spanned almost a millennium. Their language and religion tie them firmly into both the conquerors of Iran and India, and into the Nordic-Germanic stock in which those conquerors found their roots.

Though Communist and Soviet scholars attacked the origins of the Hittites in an effort to dilute and obscure the Indo-European origin of their society and culture, even a surface analysis of the Hittite culture shows it was one of the many expressions of the Aryan creative spirit found in the early portion of recorded history. ♦

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