

Water monuments in Hittite and Neo-Hittite periods: structure, functions, and connection with the “other world”

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Abstract

The great Hittite kingdom ruled over Anatolia and the northern area of Syria for a few centuries during the 2nd millennium BCE. After the end of this kingdom (12th century BCE), and after a period during which written documentation was very limited (12-10th centuries BCE), new written and archaeological sources show a different situation, fragmented into small principalities located in Anatolian areas east and south of the heartland of the previous Hittite kingdom. The present paper will focus on two important and impressive Hittite and Neo-Hittite monuments dating back to the 13th (Eflatunpınar) and 8th centuries BCE (İvriz) that are connected to water sources and/or intended to collect water. We will first examine their characteristics and environmental location, as far as possible according to archaeological and historical investigations; we will then attempt to explain, on the basis of archaeological and textual data and of previous studies, their practical function and their connections with cult and religious aspects, if any. These monuments and structures also show the peculiarities of the Anatolian territory compared to other regions of the Near East as regards the water supply.

Keywords: Ancient Anatolia, Hittite and Neo-Hittite Water Monuments, Eflatunpınar, İvriz.

Introduction

Partly following the path traced by Wittfogel (1957; cf. also the discussion in Vidal-Naquet, 1964), historical, political, and social studies on ancient Near Eastern settlements and societies often dealt with water policy and with the production of many water-based historical models. They mainly focused on the geomorphological features of Mesopotamia and Egypt, and on the political and social effects of their agricultural production based on extensive irrigation systems. Unlike these areas, in a similar chronological and cultural context, the Anatolian territory was characterized by a more widespread water supply, provided by various types of sources.

The great Hittite kingdom ruled over Anatolia and the northern area of Syria for about five centuries, during the 2nd millennium BCE. The Hittite kings of the later period (13th-early 12th centuries BCE) left us a series of works and monuments, which were often impressive, connected to springs or water basins. These structures are in many cases enriched by inscriptions and images, mainly in relief on stone, referring to the king and tutelary deities. In addition to the traditional cuneiform script, an important cultural aspect to consider is that the Hittite administration had used a new script, called ‘Anatolian Hieroglyphic (AH) writing’, since at least

the 14th century BCE. This script was also used for inscriptions placed near monuments or structures connected to water.

In the ancient common belief, the water that gushes and flows from the karst terrains was connected to the otherworldly realm (Harmanşah, 2019: 221¹) and the king, present with his image, also derived prestige from it. Some clues and above all specific geo-archaeological evidence seem to testify that the Hittite ‘hydraulic’ works had primarily practical purposes, to support agriculture and livestock, especially in areas that remained marginal with respect to the main centers of power (among others, see Emre, 1993; Harmanşah, 2018). In the final phase of the late Bronze Age, moreover, some written and archaeological evidence seems to suggest one or more periods of crisis related to changing climatic conditions and water shortages in the eastern Mediterranean area. At this stage, the water problem in Anatolia seems, therefore, to have become even more pressing (Divon, 2008; De Martino, 2018 with previous bibliography).

In Hittite cuneiform texts some words seem to re-

¹ “Emerging from the orifices of Anatolian karst geologies, water is believed to connect the divine Underworld and the surface of the earth through caves, sinkholes, springs, and river sources”.

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Fig. 1 – Map of Central-South Anatolia with the main sites mentioned in the text (map by M. Capardoni).

fer to peculiarities of the Anatolian karst landscape, such as sinkholes, cave mouths, and swallow holes (Mora *et al.*, 2017). One of the most interesting terms is ^DKASKAL.KUR, a composition of two ideograms meaning, respectively, ‘way, passage’ (KASKAL) and ‘territory, country’ (KUR), preceded by the determinative sign ‘god’ (DINGIR): ‘divine passage/opening into terrain’, generally translated ‘underground watercourse’ or (Hawkins, 2000: 293) ‘karstic slot, pot-hole’. This term has also been connected by Hawkins (1995, 2015) to a formulaic expression occurring in some inscriptions in AH writing: (DEUS) VIA+TERRA (translated ‘divine earth-road’), but some scholars have expressed doubts about this interpretation (cf. discussion in Erbil and Mouton, 2012: 59-60; cf. also Payne, 2019: fn. 49, 259).

At the beginning of the 12th century BCE, the Hittite reigning king and the court abandoned the capital city for a destination that is still unknown to us. After a period of a few centuries, during which written documentation was very limited – making historical reconstruction of the 12-10th centuries BCE extremely difficult – new written and archaeological sources show a completely different socio-political situation, fragmented into small principalities located in Ana-

tolian areas east and south of the heartland of the previous Hittite kingdom. These new states, called Neo-Hittites, displayed documentation in AH writing and no longer used the traditional cuneiform script, at least according to what is preserved. Some important monuments connected to water sources, located in the south-eastern areas of Anatolia, also date back to this period of ‘rebirth’.

We will focus below on two of the main Hittite and Neo-Hittite monumental works related to underground and spring waters, respectively the Eflatunpınar basin (13th century BCE) and the İvriz reliefs (8th century BCE) (fig. 1).

The spring of Eflatunpınar and the Hittite pool

The remains of at least three facilities linked to underground and stream water provide evidence (cf. their AH inscriptions) of king Tuthaliya IV’s attempt to regiment the waters (second half of the 13th century BCE). These remains are (i) the structure of Yalbur yaylası, a rectangular shaped pool in the Konya plain, in the vicinity of Ilgın; and (ii) the large stone blocks of Karakuyu (Pınarbaşı, Kayseri; Emre, 1993) and (iii)



Fig. 2 – The Eflatunpınar monument (courtesy of T. Bilgin).

the rectangular stone block of Köylütolu, discovered in a plain on the Ilgın-Kadınhanı road near Köylütolu, both belonging to a dam (Ehringhaus, 2005: 37 ff. with previous literature). In addition to these works, there are at least two other structures that can be attributed to the same chronological phase, the Alacahöyük/Gölpınar dam and the Eflatunpınar pool (Ehringhaus, 2005: 50-56 ff.). Among these structures, the most impressive is undoubtedly the Eflatunpınar pool (Kohlmeyer, 1983: 34-43; Rossner, 1988: 67-74; Börker-Klähn, 1993; Emre, 2002; Bachmann and Özenir, 2004; Ehringhaus, 2005: 50-57). We would therefore like to focus on the description of this monument connected with underground water. Although no inscription has been found on the monument, its style seems to point to the final phase of the 13th century BCE, probably the time of Tuthaliya IV (Hawkins, 2015: 2).

The spring Eflatunpınar lies in the Beyşehir district, west of Konya, 6 km north-east of Beyşehir Lake, wherein a series of springs gushes forth and produces a stream flowing into Beyşehir Lake. This perennial water source is embedded in an artificial complex, the most spectacular part of which is represented by a façade protruding from water and entirely covered with reliefs (figs. 2 and 3). In the center of the scene, there are two seated figures (a male and a female), each of which is surmounted by the representation of a winged sun. These two main figures are surrounded by hybrid beings, whose function is to carry the wings of the two suns, as well as the wings of an even larger winged sun that covers the entire representation. Above the larger upper winged sun, another one presumably of the same length is missing. At the bottom of the scene, under the feet of the two seated figures, there are five other partially visible figures, probably mountain-

gods. Three of these figures are characterized by the presence of openings in their bodies, through which the water of the spring was supposed to flow, thus creating a rather spectacular theatrical effect.

The two seated figures in the center of the scene have been interpreted in different ways, but most interpretations highlight their divine nature. Scholars have identified them as the proto-Hittian solar couple, as the Storm God and the Sun Goddess of the city of Arinna, or as the Sun God of the Sky and the Sun Goddess of the Earth (Bittel, 1953: 4-5; Börker-Klähn and Börker, 1975: 34 ff.; Kohlmeyer, 1983: 42-43).

Based on these interpretations, the scene that unfolds before the eyes of the audience could be interpreted as a cosmological representation of the world, with the Sun at the top, the Earth with its mountains and springs at the bottom, and the gods in the middle functioning as a link between the different elements that constitute the world (Bittel, 1953; Orthmann, 1964; Kohlmeyer, 1983; Ehringhaus, 2005: 50ff.; Erbil and Mouton, 2012; Bachmann, 2017). The representation of the winged sun, however, also recalls Hittite kingship. The winged sun, indeed, represents one of the symbols of Hittite royalty (at least since the 14th century BCE). In this regard, Erbil and Mouton (2012: 70) suggested that “the deities figuring on the monument seem to be the tutelary gods of the Hittite king himself.” But another hypothesis was put forward by Harmanşah (2015), according to whom the monument could be seen as an attempt to reproduce the appearance of a mountain spring, gushing out of the natural stone, at a place that is far from the mountains, in the middle of a valley. Within the Hittite belief system, in fact, springs, like many other natural elements, were considered places of great importance: “the



Fig. 3 – The façade of the Eflatunpınar monument (courtesy of T. Bilgin).

greater part of the landscape of Hittite Anatolia was in some sense sacred, in that the mountains, rivers and springs were so regarded (...).” (Hawkins, 2015: 1). The Eflatunpınar monument may therefore be a mimetic work that recreates a mountain spring. The basin is indeed made of the same volcanic stone of the mountains of the Anatolian plateau, and the water from the spring is channeled to gush out of the holes dug in the statues that decorate the basin just as it would have done in a real mountain spring (Harmanşah, 2015: 79).

The Eflatunpınar basin may then have been both a structure that was used for groundwater collection and storage (so important for the survival of humans and animals) and a monument that depended on the sanctity of the spring around which it was erected. In this sense, it might recall the divine openings on the Earth capable of connecting the world of humans with the Other World (see above). One may also wonder whether Eflatunpınar could be interpreted as a place of political or religious performances. Regarding this possibility, it has been suggested that ‘this sacred pool was an important station for the pilgrimage of the Great king during cultic festivals’ (Erbil and Mouton, 2012: 70). And this hypothesis may be partly confirmed by the presence of a settlement dat-

ing back to the 2nd millennium BCE in the vicinity of Eflatunpınar (Özenir, 2001: 540; cf. also Erbil 2019). This and other Hittite water basins could therefore have served as places where, not only through great works of engineering, but also through prayers and rituals, humans tried to prevent underground springs from drying up definitively, drought and death from taking over the land, and the passage between the world of human beings and gods from being closed off.

The rock reliefs of İvriz

The rock reliefs of İvriz (named after the nearby village, today renamed as Aydıncıkent) are located at the feet of the northern slopes of the Bolkar mountains in the district of Halkapınar (Konya Province). The local, karstic landscape is characterized by springs and sinkholes. The water flowing from these springs feeds the river İvriz Çayı that represents one of the main water sources of the valley down to Ereğli (fig. 1). The water gush of the springs is very abundant during spring and dries up during the summer (Ehringhaus, 2014: 48-50). The large rock relief İvriz 1 appears spatially associated with a group of springs on the edge of the river which originates a few hundred meters

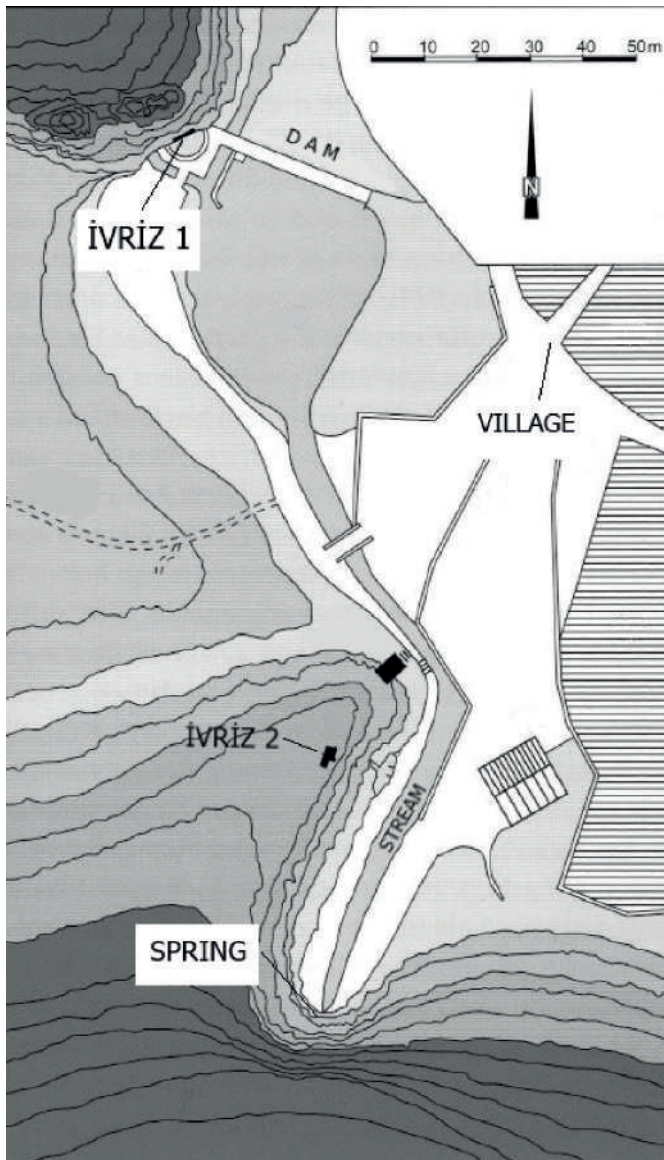


Fig. 4 – The location of the rock reliefs İvriz 1 and İvriz 2 (from Ehringhaus, 2014: fig. 49, p. 49; modified by the authors).

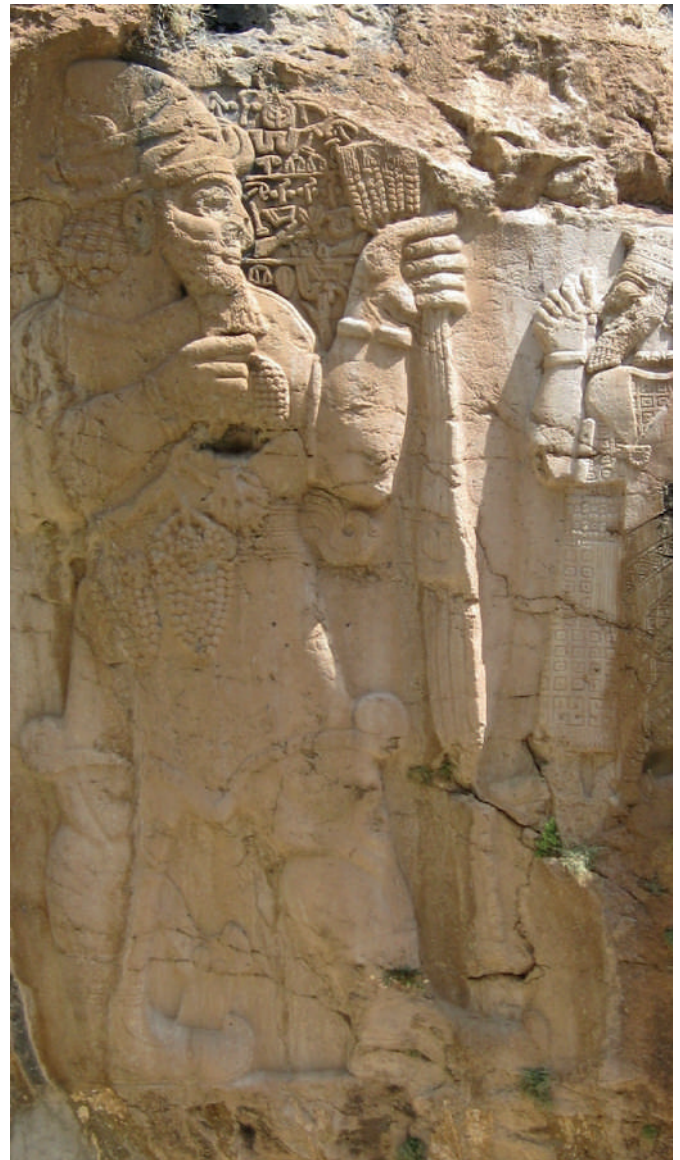


Fig. 5 – The rock relief İvriz 1 (photo by C. Mora).

upstream, from a spring on the hillside. The rock relief İvriz 2 is located just a few meters from the latter spring (fig. 4). Another rock relief is found in a narrow, steep valley known as Ambar Deresi, c.1km north of the village of Aydıncıkent.

İvriz 1 (fig. 5) depicts two human figures facing each other at different scales. Thanks to two AH inscriptions in relief accompanying the figures, it is possible to identify the larger figure on the left as the god Tarhunza (h. c.4.2m) and the smaller one on the right as the king Warpalawa of Tuwana (h. c.2.5m). The latter commissioned the monument as well, as revealed by a third AH inscription mentioning the name of the scribe and qualifying him as servant of Warpalawa (Hawkins, 2000: 516-518).

The Storm-god wears a tunic with short sleeves and two volutes at the hem, one belt supporting a sickle (Şahin, 1999), a horned headdress, boots with up-turned toes and bracelets (Aro, 2003: 335-336). He is

represented grabbing grapes and ears of grain stemming from the ground with his hands.

Similar representations of the Storm-god are also attested from elsewhere in the area of ancient city of Tuwana (classical Tyana, today Kemerhisar, south of Niğde). A strict parallel to it is also provided by the text of the Sultanhan stele, which the local ruler, Sarwatiwaras, dedicated to Tarhunza of the Vineyard, who 'came [...] and the corn-stems burgeoned forth at his foot and the vine was good here' (Hawkins, 2000: 463-472).

This god was associated with agricultural activities and the fertility of the land.

The king is represented in front of the god with the hands joined in an adoration gesture. He wears a richly decorated long vest with a belt and a cloak, possibly indigenous in origin (Aro, 2003: 336), fastened by a Phrygian brooch (Ehringhaus, 2014: 51), his head covered by a hat with a tuft on front.

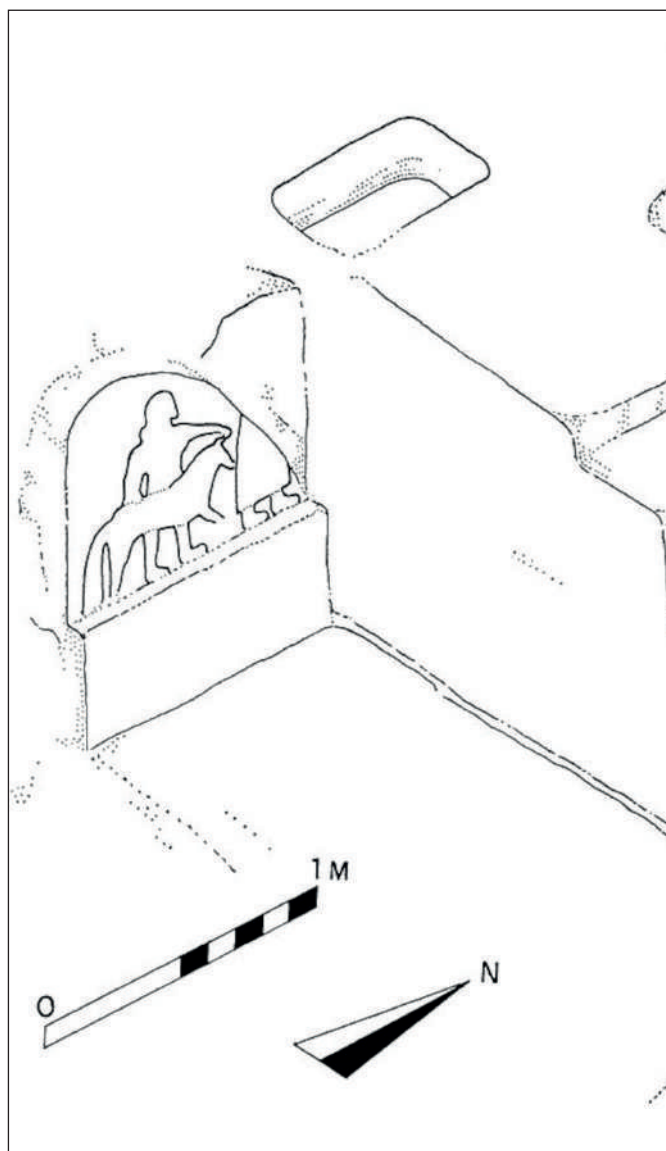


Fig. 6 – The rock relief İvriz 2 (from Bier, 1976: fig. 5, p. 120).

Scholars have generally considered the stylistic renditions of the curled hair and beards of the god and the king as of Assyrian influence (lastly Aro, 2003, and Ehringhaus, 2014).

Warpalawa was the king of a Neo-Hittite state centered on its capital Tuwana, which extended across southern Cappadocia. He is known from local inscriptions and monuments realised by himself or by other prominent figures. It is generally accepted to identify the king Warpalawa of Tuwana attested in local sources with Urballa of Tuhana mentioned in Assyrian sources between 738 and 710-709 BCE. The reign of Warpalawa is therefore assigned to the second half of the 8th century BCE.

In this period, the state of Tuwana probably represented one of the major polities among the Tabalian states. These states held the status of client states of the Assyrian power, however, the relationships with the central power were complicated by the international competition over the region, which involved

also two other major players, namely the Phrygians and the Urartians (Melville, 2010).

The İvriz 1 relief with its multiple influences well reflects the international dimension of the ruling class of a Tabalian state of the time.

Dating to the reign of Warpalawa is also a fragment of stele depicting the lower part of the Storm-god in a similar fashion to the large rock relief, accompanied by Phoenician and AH inscriptions mentioning the king, the erection of the stele to Tarhunza and list of offerings (Dinçol, 1994; Hawkins, 2000: 526). This stele was recovered in 1986 c.75m upstream from the rock relief along with a giant head (h. 0.7m) belonging to a colossal statue, possibly portraying Warpalawa (Dinçol, 1994). These findings would attest the existence of a major cultic complex dedicated to Tarhunza in the area during the second half of the 8th century BCE.

The poorly preserved rock relief İvriz 2 (fig. 6) represents a fragmentary offering scene, associated to carved steps leading to a rectangular pit carved in the rock interpreted as a stele basement (Bier 1976; D'Alfonso, 2020 with previous bibliography). Its dating is debated, spanning from earlier than the end of the 9th century to the end of the 8th century BCE (D'Alfonso, 2020 for a discussion of the topic).

If the dating of İvriz 2 to a period earlier than Warpalawa reign holds true, it would point out the long-lasting attractiveness and supposedly holy character of the place well beyond the limits of Warpalawa reign, whose monumental rendition of the place has thus to be considered as a major event in a long-lasting tradition.

A similar long-lasting appeal has been proposed also for the Ambar Deresi valley (Rojas and Sergueenko, 2014: 147-149). Close to the head of this valley, a large rock relief with the same adoration scene of İvriz 1, but without inscriptions, was carved on a steep cliff. Close to this second rock relief of Warpalawa, Christian monks set up a community during the Byzantine period including different buildings and a church with frescoes. What matters on this occasion is that also for the Ambar Deresi relief an association with ephemeral and subterranean waters can be proposed. On the one hand, the Turkish term 'dere', indicates a valley with an intermittent, seasonal stream (Ehringhaus, 2014: 49-50). On the other hand, in one cave located few meters away from the relief, the sound of flowing water was reported during September 2015 but not in June 2016 (Maner, 2017: 104). Pottery fragments from the cave would point out some activities during the Iron Age, whilst a circular pit carved in the rock at the entrance of the grotto is interpreted as a libation hole (Maner, 2017: 104).

Based mainly on written sources from the 2nd millennium BCE, scholars have proposed that the drying up of water springing from the underground cavities of İvriz may have been interpreted as a tangible manifestation of the absence of the god Tarhunza. The main aim of the cult developed around the springs, therefore, would be the propitiation

of the return of the Weather-god (Bier, 1976: 124-126; Ehringhaus, 2014: 60-61). During his reign, Warpalawa might have claimed such an important event as a royal prerogative, thus giving it also a political dimension. The archeological sites of İvriz and Ambar Deresi

thus provide examples of how the natural phenomenon of the water cycle in a karstic landscape characterized by underground passages was conceptualized with religious, ideological, and political implications which went far beyond the sole satisfaction of practical needs.

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