

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In the second decade of the 21st century, finding any given place in the world is only few clicks away, and thanks to Global Positioning System finding out where we are has become trivial. This effortlessness stems not only from the knowledge that we possess (in fact, more and more and less so), but also devices at our disposal. The rapid technological progress witnessed in last decades makes it extremely difficult to imagine how dramatically differently thought people about their world thirty-five hundred years ago.

There is hardly any device of geographical knowledge that we use today that existed in the 2nd millennium BC when the ancient Hittite Empire with its magnificent capital, Hattusa rose, thrived and eventually dwindled. We can say with fair amount of certainty that the Hittites, unlike the Greeks did not make wide use of maps, nor did they write any geographical treatises (although, interestingly enough, the greatest geographer of antiquity, Strabo, was born in Asia Minor). A natural question arises then: what and how did the Hittites knew about the world that surrounded them? Precisely this is the task of the project “The nature of geographical knowledge in Hittite Anatolia in 18th-12th century BC in the light of cuneiform sources.”

The simple question "what and how" is too general to be answered sensibly, therefore the issue has been fragmented in several smaller problems, namely: How did the Hittites oriented themselves in the world, since we know that rarely used (even if they knew) cardinal directions? How and why did their geographical horizon expand? What was the reason for such a strong need felt by the Hittite kings — unlike Egyptian pharaohs or Assyrian rulers — to delineate their vassal's borders with great detail? Of great significance is the issue of how the Hittite scribes categorised space and the world. In the Hittite cuneiform texts each geographical name was preceded by a special word, called determinative, that attributed that name to a specific category, such as ‘mountain’, ‘river’, ‘human settlement’, or ‘country’. The true and exact nature of determinatives, however, remains in many points elusive. We still do not know exactly, how to define the determinative URU, traditionally translated as “city”, since we know that this translation is often incorrect, as the Hittites used this word for every human settlement, big and small.

The last problem to be dealt with in the project is devoted to the question of distance. This may seem difficult to understand today, as signs on the road every several kilometres keep us well informed how far we have yet to go. In 2nd millennium Asia Minor, however the geographical horizon of an ordinary citizen of the Hittite Empire was quite limited and he or she hardly felt a need of knowing how far it is to Memphis or to Babylon. However, for kings and their armies distance to various places was often of crucial strategic importance. We read in accounts of Hittite conquests about days of travel needed to be covered. This unit of distance, 'a day's journey', appears also in descriptions of festivals, during which the king journeyed to various holy cities. It hardly requires long and hard studies to come to a conclusion that such a unit, however, is rather unspecific and we have to know many details about the travels to be able to estimate the true distance between the points we are interested in.

The successful answers to the questions such as the ones above are hidden in the clay tablets covered in cuneiform script and dug out by archaeologists among the ruins of the land of Hatti. A close reading of those fragments compared with research conducted by various geographers, anthropologists and scholars dealing with other ancient civilisations allows to understand how the Hittites perceived the world they live in, and, perhaps, help us better understand our own.

The idea of the project was conceived during the author's doctoral studies devoted to historical geography of central Hittite Anatolia. During the research it became apparent that reconstructing geographical relations of Hatti is doomed to be faulty as long as we do not understand how the Hittites understood their world. Lecture of Edward T. Hall's *Hidden Dimension* and Yi Fu Tuan's *Space and Place. The Perception of Experience* proved to be so fascinating that it inspired the current shape of the project.