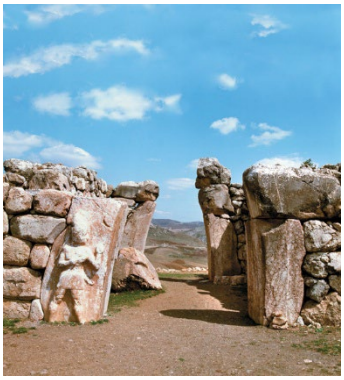
The Last Days of Hattusa

TREVOR BRYCE, DLITT

The Mysterious Collapse of the Hittite Empire



From his capital, Hattusa, in central Anatolia, the last-known Hittite king, Suppiluliuma II (1207 B.C.-?), ruled over a people who had once built a great empire—one of the superpowers (along with Egypt, Mittani, Babylon and Assyria) of the Late Bronze Age. The Kingdom of the Hittites, called Hatti, had stretched across the face of Anatolia and northern Syria, from the Aegean in the west to the Euphrates in the east. But now those days were gone, and the royal capital was about to be destroyed forever by invasion and fire.

Did Suppiluliuma die defending his city, like the last king of Constantinople 2,600 years later? Or did he spend his final moments in his palace, impassively contemplating mankind's flickering mortality?



Neither, according to recent archaeological evidence, which paints a somewhat less dramatic, though still mysterious, picture of Hattusa's last days. Excavations at the site, directed by the German archaeologist Jürgen Seeher, have indeed determined that the city was invaded and burned early in the 12th century B.C. But this destruction appears to have taken place *after* many of Hattusa's residents had abandoned the city, carrying off the valuable (and portable) objects as well as the city's important official records. The site being uncovered by archaeologists was probably little more than a ghost town during its final days.[1]

From Assyrian records, we know that in the early second millennium B.C. Hattusa was the seat of a central Anatolian kingdom. In the 18th century B.C., this settlement was razed to the ground by a king named Anitta, who declared the site accursed and then left a record of his destruction of the city. One of the first Hittite kings, Hattusili I (c. 1650–

[1] Jürgen Seeher, "Die Zerstörung der Stadt Hattusa" in *Akten des IV. Internationalen Kongresses für Hethitologie Würzburg, 4.-8. Oktober 1999*, StBoT 45, ed. Gernot Wilhelm (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001).

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1620 B.C.), rebuilt the city, taking advantage of the region's abundant sources of water, thick forests and fertile land. An outcrop of rock rising precipitously above the site (now known as Büyükkale, or "Big Castle") provided a readily defensible location for Hattusili's royal citadel.

Although Hattusa became the capital of one of the greatest Near Eastern empires, the city was almost completely destroyed several times. One critical episode came early in the 14th century, when enemy forces launched a series of massive attacks upon the Hittite homeland, crossing its borders from all directions. The attackers included Arzawan forces from the west and south, Kaskan mountain tribes from the north, and Isuwan forces from across the Euphrates in the east. The Hittite king Tudhaliya III (c. 1360?-1350 B.C.) had no choice but to abandon his capital to the enemy. Tudhaliya probably went into exile in the eastern city of Samuha (according to his grandson and biographer, Mursili II, Tudhalia used Samuha as his base of operations for reconquering lost territories). Hattusa was destroyed, and the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep III (1390–1352 B.C.) declared, in a letter tablet found at Tell el-Amarna, in Egypt, that "The Land of Hatti is finished!"



In a series of brilliant campaigns, however, largely masterminded by Tudhaliya's son Suppiluliuma I (1344–1322 B.C.), the Hittites regained their territories, and Hattusa rose once more, phoenix-like, from its ashes. During the late 14th century and for much of the 13th century B.C., Hatti was the most powerful kingdom in the Near East. Envoys from the Hittite king's "royal brothers"—the kings of Egypt, Babylon and Assyria—were regularly received in the great reception hall on Hattusa's acropolis. Vassal rulers bound by treaty came annually to Hattusa to reaffirm their loyalty and pay tribute to the Hittite king.[2]

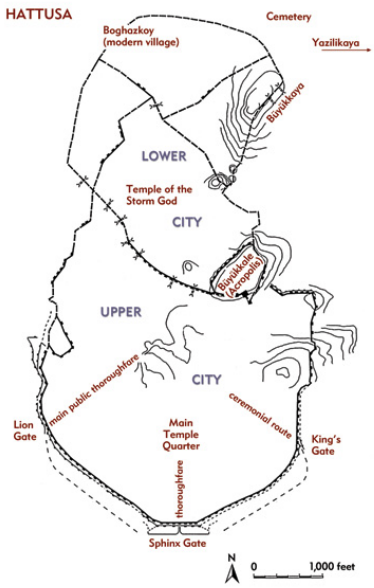
The most illustrious phase in the existence of *Hattusa* itself, however, did not come during the floruit of the Hittite empire under Suppiluliuma, his son Mursili II (c. 1321–1295 B.C.) or grandson Muwatalli II (c. 1295–1272 B.C.). At this time Hattusa was no match, in size or splendor, for the great Egyptian cities along the Nile—Thebes, Memphis and the short-lived Akhetaten, capital of the so-called heretic pharaoh Akhenaten (1352–1336 B.C.). Indeed, during Muwatalli's reign Hattusa actually went into decline when the royal seat was transferred to a new site,

[2] See Eric H. Cline, "Warriors of Hatti," review-article on Trevor Bryce's *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford, 1999), *Archaeology Odyssey*, January/February 2002).

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Tarhuntassa, near Anatolia's southern coast. Only later, when the kingdom was in the early stages of its final decline, did Hattusa become one of the great showplaces of the ancient Near East.

This renovation of the city was the inspiration of King Hattusili III (c. 1267–1237 B.C.), though his son and successor, Tudhaliya IV (c. 1237–1209 B.C.), did most of the work. Not only did Tudhaliya substantially renovate the acropolis; he more than doubled the city's size, developing a new area lying south of and rising above the old city. In the new "Upper City," a great temple complex arose. Hattusa could now boast at least 31 temples within its walls, many built during Tudhaliya's reign. Though individually dwarfed by the enormous Temple of the Storm God in the "Lower City," the new temples left no doubt about Hattusa's grandeur, impressing upon all who visited the capital that it was the religious as well as the political and administrative heart of the Hittite empire.



Tudhaliya also constructed massive new fortifications. The main casemate wall was built upon an earthen rampart to a height of 35 feet, punctuated by towers at 70-foot intervals along its entire length. The wall twice crossed a deep gorge to enclose the Lower City, the Upper City and an area to the northeast; this was surely one of the most impressive engineering achievements of the Late Bronze Age.



What prompted this sudden and dramatic—perhaps even frenetic—surge of building activity in these last decades of the kingdom's existence?

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One is left with the uneasy feeling that the Hittite world was living on the edge. Despite outward appearances, all was not well with the kingdom, or with the royal dynasty that controlled it. To be sure, Tudhaliya had some military successes; in western Anatolia, for instance, he appears to have eliminated the threat posed by the Mycenaean Greeks to the Hittite vassal kingdoms, which extended to the Aegean Sea.[3] But he also suffered a major military defeat to the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta, which dispelled any notion that the Hittites were invincible in the field of battle. Closer to home, Tudhaliya wrote anxiously to his mother about a serious rebellion that had broken out near the homeland's frontiers and was likely to spread much farther.

Within the royal family itself, there were serious divisions. For this, Tudhaliya's father, Hattusili, was largely responsible. In a brief but violent civil war, he had seized the throne from his nephew Urhi-Teshub (c. 1272–1267 B.C.) and sent him into exile. But Urhi-Teshub was determined to regain his throne. Fleeing his place of exile, he attempted to win support from foreign kings, and he may have set up a rival kingdom in southern Anatolia.

Urhi-Teshub's brother Kurunta may also have contributed to the deepening divisions within the royal family. After initially pledging his loyalty to Hattusili, he appears to have made an attempt upon the throne when it was occupied by his cousin Tudhaliya. Seal impressions dating to this period have been found in Hattusa with the inscription "Kurunta, Great King, Labarna, My Sun." A rock-cut inscription recently found near Konya, in southern Turkey, also refers to Kurunta as "Great King." The titles "Great King," "Labarna" and "My Sun" were strictly reserved for the throne's actual occupant—suggesting that Kurunta may have instigated a successful coup against Tudhaliya.

[3] One of the Hittite vassal kingdoms was almost certainly Troy (called "Ilios" and "Troia" by Homer and "Wilusa" by the Hittites). See the following articles in *Archaeology Odyssey*: "Greeks vs. Hittites: Why Troy is Troy and the Trojan War Is Real" (interview with Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier), July/August 2002; and "Is Homer Historical?" (interview with Gregory Nagy), May/June 2004.

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Kurunta had every right to mount such a coup. Like Urhi-Teshub, he was a son of the legitimate king, Muwatalli. Urhi-Teshub's and Kurunta's rights had been denied when their uncle, Hattusili, usurped royal power for himself and his descendants. If Kurunta did indeed rectify matters by taking the throne by force around 1228 B.C., his occupancy was short-lived, for Tudhaliya again became king, and he remained king for many years after Kurunta disappeared from the historical record.

Nevertheless, the dynasty remained unstable. In an address to palace dignitaries, Tudhaliya made clear how insecure his position was:

> The Land of Hatti is full of the royal line: In Hatti the descendants of Suppiluliuma, the descendants of Mursili, the descendants of Muwatalli, the descendants of Hattusili are numerous. Regarding the kingship, you must acknowledge no other person (but me, Tudhaliya), and protect only the grandson and great grandson and descendants of Tudhaliya. And if at any time(?) evil is done to His Majesty—(for) His Majesty has many brothers—and someone approaches another person and speaks thus: "Whomever we select for ourselves need not even be a son of our lord!"—these words must not be (permitted)! Regarding the kingship, you must protect only His Majesty and the descendants of His Majesty. You must approach no other person!

Another serious problem confronted the last kings of Hatti. There may well have been widespread famine in the Hittite kingdom during its final decades. The Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah (1213–1203 B.C.) refers to grain shipments sent to the Hittite king "to keep alive the land of Hatti." Tudhaliya himself sent an urgent letter to the king of Ugarit, demanding a ship and crew for the transport of 450 tons of grain. The letter ends by stating that it is a matter of life or death! Was the Hittite kingdom being slowly starved into oblivion?

The Hittite economy was based primarily on agriculture, requiring a substantial labor force. At the same time, the annual Hittite military campaigns were heavily labor-intensive—draining off Hatti's strong young men from the domestic workforce. To some extent this was compensated for by captives brought back to the homeland and used as farm laborers. Even so, the kingdom faced chronic shortages of manpower.

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Increasingly, the Hittites came to depend on outside sources of grain, supplied by vassal states in north Syria and elsewhere. After 1259 B.C., when the Hittites signed a treaty with the Egyptians,[4] Hatti began importing grain from Egypt.



In times of peace and stability, foreign imports made up for local shortfalls. But once supply routes were threatened, the situation changed dramatically. Grain shipments from Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean were transported to Ura, on the Anatolian coast, and then carried overland to Hatti. The eastern Mediterranean was always a dangerous place for commercial shipping, since it was infested with pirates who attacked ships and raided coastal ports. As conditions throughout the region became more unsettled toward the end of the 13th century B.C., the threats to shipping became ever greater.



This provides the context for the Hittite military operations around the island of Cyprus during the reigns of Tudhaliya and his son Suppiluliuma II. The operations were almost certainly aimed at destroying enemy forces that were disrupting grain supplies. These enemies were probably seaborne marauders who had invaded Cyprus to use its harbors as bases for their attacks on shipping in the region. Dramatic evidence of the dangers they posed is provided by a letter from the last king of Ugarit, Ammurapi, to the king of Cyprus, who had earlier asked Ammurapi for assistance:

> My father, behold, the enemy's ships came (here); my cities(?) were burned, and they did evil things in my country. Does not my father know that all my troops and chariots(?) are in the Land of Hatti, and all my ships are in the Land of Lukka? … Thus the country is abandoned to itself. May my father know it: The seven ships of the enemy that came here inflicted much damage upon us.[5]

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[4] For more on this treaty, signed with the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II (1279–1213 B.C.), see Jack Meinhardt, "'Look on My Works!' The Many Faces of Ramesses the Great," *Archaeology Odyssey* September/October 2003.

[5] Document from Ras Shamra, trans. M.J. Astour, "New Evidence on the Last Days of Ugarit," *American Journal of Archaeology* 69 (1965), p. 255.

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So, while a grave crisis was mounting in the land, with periods of famine, unrest and war aggravated by a dysfunctional royal dynasty, the Hittite kings decided to rebuild Hattusa!

This project obviously required enormous resources. Where did the workers come from? It would have been dangerous to deplete the ranks of the army during a period of conflict with Assyria in the east, rebellion near the homeland's frontiers (the one Tudhaliya described to his mother) and attacks by marauders in the Mediterranean. The construction workers had to be recruited from among the able-bodied men working the farms—yet another strain on the already taxed Hittite economy.[6]

How do we explain this?

The new city was the brainchild of Tudhaliya's father, Hattusili, who was always conscious of the fact that he was not the legitimate successor to the throne. Hattusili thus made great efforts to win acknowledgment from his royal peers: the kings of Egypt, Babylon and Assyria. It was also important for him to win acceptance from his own subjects. His brother and predecessor King Muwatalli had transferred the royal seat to Tarhuntassa. Very likely Hattusili decided to win favor from his people—and the gods—by reinstating Hattusa, the great ancestral Hittite city, as the kingdom's capital, and to do so on a grander scale than ever before. In this way, Hattusili-the-usurper could assume the role of Hattusili-the-restorer-of-the-old-order.

Did this provide a compelling motive for his son, Tudhaliya, who actually undertook the project? Or was Tudhaliya's commitment to rebuilding the capital as a city of the gods an expression of religious fervor,[7] especially as his kingdom was beginning to crumble around him? Or was he engaging in a gigantic bluff—creating a spectacular mirage of wealth and power in an attempt to delude subjects, allies and enemies into believing that the fragile empire he ruled was embarking upon a grand new era? Dramatically appealing as such explanations may be, they do not square with the picture we have of Tudhaliya as a level-headed, responsible and pragmatic ruler.

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[6] Given the fragile condition of Hittite food production at this time, any number of events could have precipitated a crisis, such as severe drought or earthquakes (see Amos Nur and Eric H. Cline, "What Triggered the Collapse? Earthquake Storms," *Archaeology Odyssey*, September/October 2001).

[7] Tudhaliya IV was also responsible for the impressive sculptural decorations in the sanctuary at Yazilikaya, about a mile northeast of Hattusa (see E.C. Krupp, "Sacred Sex in the Hittite Temple of Yazilikaya," *Archaeology Odyssey*, March/April 2000).

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In short, the massive rebuilding of Hattusa at this time remains a mystery, one of the many mysteries attending the collapse of the Bronze Age.[8]

Only a handful of texts survive from the reign of Tudhaliya's son Suppiluliuma II, and these tell a mixed story. On the one hand, some texts point to continuing unrest among his own subjects, including the elite elements of the state, and to acts of outright defiance by vassal states. On the other hand, military documents record conquests in southern and western Anatolia and naval victories off the coast of Cyprus. These conflicting documents from Suppiluliuma's reign bring our written records of the Hittite kingdom abruptly to an end. Suppiluliuma, the last known monarch to rule from Hattusa, was almost certainly the king who witnessed the fall of the kingdom of Hatti.

What happened at the royal capital? The evidence of widespread destruction by fire on the royal acropolis, in the temples of both the Upper City and Lower City, and along stretches of the fortifications, suggests a scenario of a single, simultaneous, violent destruction in an all-consuming conflagration. The final blow may have been delivered by bands of Kaskan peoples from the Pontic zone in the north, who had plagued the kingdom from its early days.

As we have seen, however, recent archaeological investigations indicate that by this time the city had already been largely abandoned. The Hittites saw the end coming!

Perhaps Suppiluliuma arranged for the departure of his family while it was still safe, and ordered the evacuation of the most important members of his administration, including a staff of scribes (who carried off the tablets), and a large part of his troops and personal bodyguards. The hoi polloi were left to fend for themselves. Those who stayed behind scavenged through the leavings of those who had departed. When Hattusa was little more than a decaying ruin, outside forces moved in, plundering and torching a largely derelict settlement.

This raises an important question. If the elite elements of Hittite society abandoned Hattusa, where did they go? Did Suppiluliuma set up a new capital elsewhere? That is not beyond the realm of possibility, for we know of at least two earlier occasions when king and court left Hattusa and re-established their capital in another place (Samuha and Tarhuntassa). We know, too, that at Carchemish on the Euphrates River, which had been

[8] Hattusa was one of many cities in the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean—including Ugarit, Troy, Knossos and Mycenae—that were destroyed toward the end of the second millennium B.C. See the following articles in *Archaeology Odyssey*, September/October 2001: William H. Stiebing, Jr., "When Civilization Collapsed: Death of the Bronze Age"; and Amos Nur and Eric H. Cline, "What Triggered the Collapse? Earthquake Storms."

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made a vice-regal seat in the 14th century B.C., a branch of the Hittite royal family survived for perhaps several centuries after the fall of Hattusa. In fact, northern Syria became the homeland of a number of so-called neo-Hittite kingdoms in the early part of the first millennium. Did Suppiluliuma and his entourage find a new home in Syria?

It may be that the final pages of Hittite history still exist somewhere. In the last few decades, thousands of tablets have been found at sites throughout the Hittite world. This inspires hope that more archives of the period have yet to be found, including the last records of the Hittite empire. If Suppiluliuma II did in fact arrange a systematic evacuation of Hattusa, taking with him everything of importance, the stuff had to go somewhere. Maybe it still lies beneath the soil, awaiting discovery.

The Hittite Kings

Old Kingdom

Labarna	–1650	
Hattusili I	1650–1620	(grandson?)
Mursili I	1620–1590	(grandson, adopted son)
Hantili I	1590–1560	(brother-in-law)
Zidanta I		(son-in-law)
Ammuna	1560–1525	(son)
Huzziya I		(brother of Ammuna's daughter-in-law)
Telipinu	1525–1500	(brother-in-law)
Alluwamna		(son-in-law)
Tahurwaili		(interloper)
Hantili II		(son of Alluwamna?)
Zidanta II	1500–1400	(son?)
Huzziya II		(son?)
Muwatalli I		(interloper)

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New Kingdom

Tudhaliya I/II		(grandson of Huzziya II?)
Arnuwanda I	1400–1360	(son-in-law, adopted son)
Hattusili II?		(son?)
Tudhaliya III	1360–1350	(son?)
Suppiluliuma I	1344–1322	(son)
Arnuwanda II	1322–1321	(son)
Mursili II	1321–1295	(brother)
Muwatalli II	1295–1272	(son)
Urhi-Tesub	1272–1267	(son)
Hattusili III	1267–1237	(uncle)
Tudhaliya IV	1237–1228	(son)
Kurunta	1228–1227	(cousin)
Tudhaliya IV	1227–1209	(cousin)
Arnuwanda III	1209–1207	(son)
Suppiluliuma II	1207–	(brother)

How We Know What We Know: The Hittite Archives

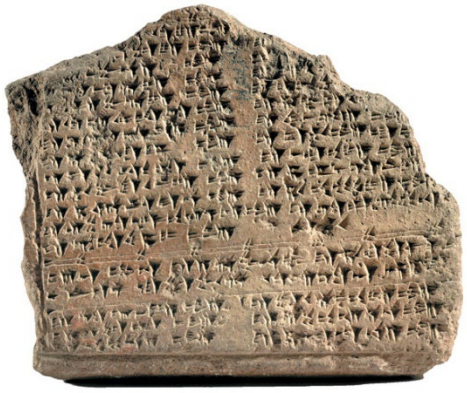
The Hittites were perhaps the world's first historians. On numerous clay tablets recovered largely over the last century by archaeologists, they wrote down what we today recognize as history, rather than merely relating myths or the acts of the gods.[9]

[9] See Richard H. Beal, "History's History: Learning to Distinguish Fact from Fancy," Origins, *Archaeology Odyssey*, January/February 2003.

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Much of what we know about the Hittites, therefore, comes from the pen (or stylus) of the Hittites themselves.

The earliest excavations on the site of Hattusa were conducted by the German archaeologist Hugo Winckler in the first decade of the 20th century. They brought to light thousands of tablets, often fragmentary, from Hattusa's palace and temple archives. A total of eight languages are represented in the tablets, all inscribed in the cuneiform script developed in Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C.



Many of the tablets found at Hattusa are written in Akkadian, a Semitic language used by the Babylonians and Assyrians. During the Late Bronze Age, Akkadian also functioned as the international language of diplomacy; many of these tablets are thus correspondence between Hittite kings and their vassal states in Syria or foreign kingdoms (such tablets have also been found, for example, at Tell el-Amarna, Egypt, site of the pharaoh Akhenaten's capital).

Most of the tablets, however, are written in a language that was unknown to Hattusa's first excavators. This language turned out to be Hittite, the language of the Hittites themselves (though they called it Nesite). The Hittite language was deciphered during the First World War by a Czech scholar named Bedr◎ich Hrozny´, who concluded (correctly) that it was a member of the Indo-European family of languages and thus related to Sanskrit, Greek and Latin.

The tablets vary widely in content: historical annals, treaties and diplomatic correspondence, collections of laws and prayers, ritual texts, lists of festivals, literary and mythological texts, and lists of towns with ties to the Hittite empire, such as the 13th-century B.C. tablet shown. In 1986, an intact bronze tablet—the first metal tablet from the Hittite world—was discovered near Hattusa's Sphinx Gate. This tablet is inscribed with the text of a treaty between the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV (1237–1209 B.C.) and his cousin Kurunta, ruler of the Hittite appanage kingdom of Tarhuntassa.

On seals and in monumental rock-cut inscriptions, the Hittites used a hieroglyphic script written in the Luwian language. Luwian is an Indo-European language closely related to

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Hittite. The only writing found so far in Late Bronze Age Troy, for example, is a bronze seal inscribed with Luwian hieroglyphics.[10]

Hittite archives have also come to light in outlying parts of the Hittite empire (at Emar on the Euphrates River in modern Syria, for instance) and at administrative centers in and near the Hittite homeland. Archaeologists recently found over 3,000 tablets at the site of ancient Sapinuwa (modern Ortaköy), northeast of Hattusa. Although these tablets have not yet been published, provincial archives from other sites have taught us much about the day-to-day administration of the kingdom's provinces and the lives of local officials. **—T.B.**

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[10] See Birgit Brandau, "Can Archaeology Discover Homer's Troy?" *Archaeology Odyssey*, Premiere Issue 1998.