

## Hittite and Sumerian

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The Hittites who lived in central Anatolia during the second millennium BC spoke a language which is accepted as the first Indo-European language. However, the greater part of the Hittite vocabulary is of non-Indo-European origin (1). In Hittite the laryngeal (guttural) sounds originated from the Asiatic Proto-language. For example, the “kh” sound is found in many words and should be pronounced as “Okh”. The name **Hittite** was given to this language by modern scholars as being the official language of the **Land of Hatti**; but it should be pronounced as **Okh-At-ili**. Since the Hittite language was a monosyllabic language connected to the Proto-language and to all Altaic languages, one should split the words into its constituent phonemes. **Okh** means “arrow”, **At** means “horse” (2) and “**il**” means “The Land”, while “**illi**” means “from the land” or “belonging to the land”, therefore **Okh-At-illi** or **Okh-At-ly** became Khattili => Hattili and finally Hittite. The suffix “-ly” is still existing in Turkish meaning “mixed together”, giving a further meaning to Okhatly “a mixture of Okh and At people”. It is most probable that “At” and “As” were names given to the same people originating from western Asia. We find “At” and the suffix “-illi” in the name of the Hun leader Atilla or Atilli.

The Hittites used two different scripts simultaneously. These were the hieroglyphic and the cuneiform scripts. The cuneiform script was adopted by the Hittites from the Accadians. This means that there was a close relationship in both language and culture between the Hittites and the Accadians. The name **Accad** becomes meaningful when split into its constituents Acc (Okh) and Ad meaning “name”. We get from Och-At = Okh-Ad => Akhad => Accad the meaningful word “Okh name” a clear indication to the Och people. The laryngeal “kh” changed in time and softened to a double-c.

The hieroglyphic script was mostly used to write in the Luwi language and was the preferred script on monuments and seals. The Luwi language is closely related to Hittite and is mentioned as Luwili in Hittite texts. Luwili later on transformed into Lycian, which became the language used by the south-Anatolian Lycians of the classical epoch. Below left we see a stele inscribed with the Hittite cuneiform script and on the right a portion of a wall inscribed with hieroglyphic script from Hattusas, Central Turkey (3).



**Hittite cuneiforms and hieroglyphs**

In order to show the connection between Hittite and the Altaic languages we need concrete examples obtained from written original texts. There is a book published in 1980 by Ahmet Unal discussing some Hittite phrases (4). We find many Sumerian words in these sentences, which could either be borrowed from the ancient Sumerian language of Mesopotamia or could also be independently related to the Asiatic Proto-language. Here is one example:

**Dingir-lim** : My God. “Dingir” meaning “God” in Sumerian, already discussed in chapter 22, **Egyptian Deities**. “-lim” is a suffix still used in Turkish as a possessive pronoun.

**Kililu = Gilim** : Wreath or Headdress. “Kyl” means “hair” or rather a single thread of hair in Turkish. But “kylly” means “mixed with threads of hair” (-ly is already mentioned above) and therefore the Hittite word Kililu or Gilim is an appropriate definition for a wreath worn on the head.

**Lu-Sang-a**: To the holy priest. The first syllable stands for “holy” and is found in Turkish as “ulu”, already mentioned in Chapter 29, **The bird symbolism**. Sang means “respectful, important person” and is found in Japanese as “san” and in Turkish as “sayın”. The same meaning is found in “saint”. The suffix “-a” meaning “to the” is still used in Turkish. Therefore, Lusanga means “to the saint”.

We see that Hittite is an agglutinant language similar to Altaic languages containing several suffixes still existing in modern Turkish. Such a sentence formation is not found in most Indo-European languages. These three words above are enough to explain an original sentence obtained from a Hittite text:

**DINGIR-LIM GILIM-an-zi LU-SANGA-ya GILIM-an-zi**, which can be translated as: “They adorn the god with a wreath and also the priest (saint) with a wreath”. The “-zi” suffix makes the word definite, similar to the English “is” or the German “ist”. In Turkish “iz” stands for the definite plural similar to “we are”.

Without going into further detail we can conclude that the Hittite language forms a bridge between Altaic and western Indo-European languages. The original connection between Hittite and Sumerian can be traced back to the Proto-language of Asia from which Turkish is the closest descendent. In order to be convinced of such an ancient connection between Turkish and Sumerian here is a short list of Sumerian words. The Turkish equivalent is given in red and in brackets.

**Father: Adda (ata, baba), Mother: Ama (anne, ana), Lord: Aga (agha), Horizon: An (tan), Male: Ar(er), First: As (as), God: Dingir (Tengri), House: E (ev), Shore: Kiya (kıyı), Blow: Es (es), Fat: Gisko (shishko), Upright: Dim (dik), Arm: Kol (kol), Sleep: Uiku (Uyku), Bird: Kus (kush), Right side: Sag (sağ), Oak: Mesu (meshe), Sheepfold: Ag (agıl), Large: En (en, engin), Come: Ge (gel), Blood: Ka (kan), Canal/Blood vessel: Kanal (kan damar), Say: De (de, demek), Stop: Duru (dur), Settle: Kur (kur, kurgan), Run: Kusu (kosh), Smile: Güles (gülech), Bore: Bur (burgu), Ax: Bal (balta), Shine: Bar (barla/parla), String/Rope: İb (ip), Pretty: Alım (alımlı), Holy: Ulu (ulu), Separate: Kup (kop), Who: Gim (kim), Soldier: Ir (er), Wood: Odun (odun/ot-un)**

These 37 words form a small but important sample showing that even after almost 5,000 years we can still find common words between Turkish and Sumerian, containing the same sound and the same meaning (5).

Turning our attention to the Sumerian architecture, we see that people living on the flat prairies of Mesopotamia built stepped pyramids called ziggurats. They built these high structures as symbols replacing the mountains which lacked in their region. We saw that this wish for high-rise architecture existed also among the Maya and the Egyptians. The common

architectural designs are another sign of their common origin. Not only the Sumerians, but also the Elamites who lived in south-western Iran built ziggurats (see Chapter 18, **Towards Sumer and Elam**).

Below-left we see the Sumerian ziggurat near Ur and the Elamite ziggurat presently in Khuzestan, Choghazanbil - Western Iran. Khuzestan is the region of Iran bordering Mesopotamia. This name is clearly **Ghuz-istan** originally being Oghuz-istan or **Oghuz-land**, clearly indicating that the ziggurat structures were built by the Och people. Oguz means “**we are the Och**” (see Chapter 2, **Diversification of languages**).



Sumerian ziggurat at Ur



Original form



Remains of Choghazanbil ziggurat

## References

- (1) **The Hittites**, O. R. Gurney, Pinguin Books, page 119, 1976, England.
- (2) See Chapter 12, The Anatolian expansion.
- (3) **Atlas Magazine** (in Turkish), Jorgen Seeher, May 1999, page 88.
- (4) **Hitit Sarayindaki Entrikalar Hakkinda Bir Fal Metni**, A. Unal, Ankara University Publication, No: 343, page 82, 1983, Ankara, Turkey.
- (5) **Sumer ve Turk Dillerinin Tarihi Ilgisi**, Osman Nedim Tuna, TDK Yayinlari, No: 561, 1990, Ankara, Turkey.