



Politics and Propaganda in the Negative Historiography of the Hittite Old Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Hattuřili I faced a formidable threat to his throne from his aunt, Tawananna, who was based in Hurma. Realizing the inherent power of political propaganda, he commissioned a unique Hittite genre that Beckman has termed “negative historiography” to mitigate this threat. This genre highlighted the incompetence of various Hurmean figures in a comical way, thereby engineering a widespread negative Hurmean stereotype throughout the kingdom and preventing Tawananna from gathering any significant “grassroots” following. This paper demonstrates that once the threat was neutralized, the literary genre lost its *raison d’être* and disappeared from the scene.

Keywords: Hattuřili I, Royal family conflicts, Hittite military campaigns, Depictions of incompetence, Hittite narrative techniques, Hittite capital transition



Introduction

In his discussion of *The Siege of Uršu*, Gary Beckman (1995, 33) coined the phrase “negative historiography” to describe the unique character of both this text and *The Palace Chronicle*.¹ Historiography throughout the ancient Near East was a product of the royal court and designed to reinforce the legitimacy of the ruling king or his dynasty. Most instances of such historiography legitimated the ruler’s kingship by means of positive reinforcement, such as extolling the king’s virtues and describing the heroic or benevolent acts he has performed. Negative historiographic literature takes a different approach to achieve the same aim. In these texts, there is little focus or emphasis on the actions of the king. He primarily remains in the background, either giving the initial orders for the activities that will occur or reacting to unexpected actions. It is instead incompetent bureaucrats, politicians, employees, and military leaders who take the front stage.

This approach served two broad purposes. First, it defended the established Hittite monarchy, which was constantly beset by usurpers from among the royal family and royal court.² Disparaging these groups was one way for the king to limit the popularity of any potential rivals. The second purpose followed from the first. By downplaying the competence of the king’s rivals, the negative historiography would in turn bolster the view of the king’s competence as a ruler in contrast to his rivals.

II. The Prominence of Hurma

Although the material contained in the individual episodes of *The Palace Chronicle* and *The Siege of Uršu* is diverse, there is one overriding theme that ties most of them together more concretely than just as stories of incompetence. Natives of the city of Hurma feature prominently throughout. This is so pervasive that it is difficult to chalk it up to mere coincidence.

Among the many characters from Hurma is Šanda, a military commander who can’t seem to do anything right in *The Siege of Uršu*. There is, admittedly, no direct reference to the city of Hurma or to Šanda’s relationship to it in *The Siege of Uršu*. However, Beal (2003, 27) identifies this Šanda, who leads the titular siege on Uršu (KBo 1.11),³ with the Šanda whom the king condemns to mutilation due to either cowardice in the face of the Hurrians or for secretly meeting with them in the fourth vignette of *The Palace Chronicle* (KBo 3.34 II 32;

1 KBo 1.11; KBo 3.34 II 32; OH/NS, Muršili I, CTH 8. De Martino (2005, 227) specifically excludes these two texts from his list of Hittite historiographical texts.

2 See, v.gr. the *Political Testament of Hattušili* (KUB I 16 II 8–36, 63–68, III 6–25; Beckman 2002). This document provides an overview of the kingdom’s internal affairs during the period, detailing the revolts led by the king’s son, sister, and daughter, and the significant damage these events inflicted on the country. See as well Yiğit (2006; 2007).

3 Cf. CHT 7; Beckman 1995. Forlanini (2004, 3884) suggested that KBo 1.11 could be dated to Labarna.

OH/NS, Muršili I, CTH 8). It is in this text that we learn that Šanda was a *LÚ URU*Hurma, literally, “a man from Hurma.”⁴

Appearing immediately before Šanda in the third vignette of *The Palace Chronicle* (KBo 3.34 II 32), is Nunnu, who embezzles money from the city coffers. He and his replacement are then tied to an oxcart and forced to watch as the representatives of the king slaughter a family member before them. If *The Palace Chronicle*'s Šanda can be identified with the figure of the same name in *The Siege of Uršu*, as Beal argues, then the Nunnu who embezzles money from the city coffers could be the same Nunnu who, in *The Siege of Uršu*, commits “a foul deed.” (KBo 1.11 Obv. 26-27).

Finally, there is Askaliya, who is depicted as having a grudge against a potter named Ispudasinara.

There are also four individuals who appear in *The Palace Chronicle* that lack any apparent association with Hurma. However, these four figures are thematically connected in a way that does not apply to the three leaders of Hurma. First, each holds an occupation in food-related services. This includes the unnamed bread baker in the first vignette, the kitchen manager Pappa in the second vignette, and Ewarisatuni and Zidi, who are both identified as cupbearers in the fifth and sixth vignettes, respectively. Beyond their occupations, these characters are connected by the very nature of their stories, which differs from those of the city lords of Hurma. They each meet with a fate that has a direct connection with both their occupations and the crimes they committed.

The bread baker meets his fate in a fire, similar to the fire of the oven in which he baked a loaf of bread with a pebble in it. The kitchen supervisor must drink salted beer after serving the soldiers bread that was ground up like salt. Slightly less obvious are the punishments allotted to the two cupbearers. Ewarisatuni was mutilated for serving one of the king's guests wine in a beer mug.⁵ Zidi, conversely, had served the king's guests poor-quality wine, reserving the good wine for the king. For this, officials either “worked him over” or “finished him off.” The meaning of the iterative form of *eš-* is difficult to discern in this context.

Hurma also appears in *The Tale of Zalpa*. After Alluwa leads the city of Zalpa in an ill-fated revolt, Hattuša enters into a peace treaty with its defeated citizens. In this context, an unnamed Hittite king gifts Hurma to a political ally. This suggests that Hurma was in some way allied with Zalpa against Hattuša in this conflict. The control of Hurma thus accompanied the defeat of Zalpa and the peace treaty that followed. This serves to implicate Hurma in the rebellious behavior of Zalpa. Although *The Tale of Zalpa* does not fall into the literary genre

4 The interpretation and translation of this phrase will be explored in more detail in Section VI.

5 Although the text is broken at the point where the punishment would be narrated, the presence of the verb “[*k/* *u-uk-ku-ri-iš-ki-ir*” (KBo II 34 I 29) gives a clear indication of the punishment meted out to Ewarisatuni.

of negative historiography, it is certainly a negative portrayal of Zalpa that was composed during the Old Kingdom period. In the same way that *The Tale of Zalpa* paints the city and its inhabitants in a bad light, so does the negative historiography of Hurma paint an unflattering picture of the city and its denizens.

III. The Character of the King

One of the striking features of each text that falls into the category of negative historiography is the absence of any identification of the kings involved. None of these texts names any of the kings mentioned in the narratives. In most cases, the narrative proceeds with reference to the king only by his title, *LUGAL*. When these texts reference a different king, they continue to use circumspect titles like “the king’s grandfather” or “the old king.” This narrative strategy further reinforces the *negative* aspect of this genre by deflecting the focus off the king and placing it squarely on the incompetent lackeys in his service.

The king’s main role in most of these stories is to mete out punishment to these incompetents. He therefore plays an extremely passive role. Although the king is clearly a man actor in *The Siege of Uršu*, his only actions are to give orders and to become angry when his subordinates fail to carry them out. This is atypical of ancient Near Eastern royal historiography, which usually highlights the active role kings played in military conquests or building projects.

IV. Incompetent Lackeys

Barjamovic (2011, 186) suggests that *LÚ URUHurma* should be translated as “city lord of Hurma,” which might be considered a role similar to that of mayor. It is understandable that Barjamovic reaches this conclusion, given the use of this particular construction by most Akkadian scribes used this particular construction (CAD 1968, 57). However, there are several reasons to suggest that the Hittite scribes were innovative in their use of this title. In most of the cases in *The Palace Chronicle* where this term appears, the individual in question is living in a different town, where he is clearly performing a different official role.⁶ In addition, the scribes identify one of the figures in *The Palace Chronicle*, Askaliya, as *URUHuru-ur-mi EN-aš*, or the “lord/ruler of Hurma.” It is only after Askaliya is removed from his position as the “ruler of Hurma” and installed as the *AGRIG* of Ankuwa that the scribes identify him as *LÚ URUHurma*. Moreover, it is *URUHuru-ur-mi EN-aš*, not *LÚ URUHurma*, that is used in later texts to describe the rulers of this city.⁷

6 E.g., Nunnu is embezzling from the coffers of Arzawya (KBo 3.34 I 11–12); Šanda is a palace official in Hassuwa when he deserts to the Hurrian overlord (KBo 3.34 I 24); and Askaliya is a “deputy” or “agent” in the city of Utaḫzumi (KBo 3.34 II 15–16).

7 Cf. KUB 8.69 obv. 10–13; KuT 6 I:13; KBo 4.10 rev. 32; KUB 26.43 rev. 32.

Goedegebuure (2014, 561) suggests “ambassador of Hurma” as the best translation of *LÚ URUHurma*. There are two problems with this suggestion. It seems odd that an ambassador would be present and needed from a city other than, Hattuša, the Hittite capital, or even Kussara, the older Hittite capital. The second problem is that there would be no reason for a city ambassador to have access to the host city’s coffers as Nunnu has in the third vignette. It seems much more likely that this is simply a gentilic, identifying these figures as “Hurmites,” individuals whose roots are in the city of Hurma. This is not to say that the phrase *LÚ + GN* is never used to indicate the ruler of the city. The expression *LÚ + GN* could refer to the country from where the individual comes, to the governor of a province, as well as to the local ruler of a country.

A third construction, *DUMU + GN*, is also used to describe the relationship of these individuals to the city of Hurma. Although not used with the city of Hurma itself, this construction identifies several figures in the heavily broken third column of KBo 3.34. Soysal (1989, 86) translates these instances as “Fürst,” which seems the most appropriate for the context in which they appear. However, this interpretation also requires an innovative use of the phrase by the Hittite scribes, since the Akkadian scribes used it to indicate the natives of a city (CAD 1977, 315-316).

In some cases, the logogram *LÚ* has the same meaning as *DUMU*, including in *The Palace Chronicles*.⁸ I therefore propose that the Hittite scribes conflated the two constructions *LÚ + GN* and *DUMU + GN* in their minds. Therefore, in Hittite texts, both meanings “native of *GN*” and “ruler of *GN*” can apply to either construction.

V. The Historical Significance of Hurma

The key to understanding the *raison d’être* of the negative historiography of Hurma lies within the historical-political realities surrounding the Old Kingdom and especially the reign of Hattušili I. As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, the focus and theme of the negative historiography and what it repeatedly returns to are the individuals from, or closely associated with, the city of Hurma.⁹ This is not to say that the events highlighted in these texts occurred within Hurma, but rather that the main players in the events were most often Hurmean. Although Hurma practically disappeared from the Hittite political and military landscape after the Old Kingdom period, it played a significant role in these arenas during that time.¹⁰

8 Regarding the *DUMU* of Purušanda and KBo 3.27 (+) 28, see Dardano (2004).

9 About Hurma in this context, see Ünal (1996) and Martínez (2016).

10 After the Old Kingdom period, the influence of the city of Hurma on the wider Hittite kingdom seems to have been relegated to the religious sphere.

The earliest kings of the Hittite kingdom reigned from Kussara. It was during the reign of Hattušili I that the capital moved to Hattuša, where it would remain until the downfall of the kingdom. However, between Kussara and Hattuša there was another Hittite seat of power: Hurma. In his reconstruction of the family tree of Hattušili I, Beal identifies PU-Šarruma as his grandfather. According to *The Tale of Zalpa*, PU-Šarruma gave the city of Hurma to the father of Labarna I, “The father of the old king.” At that point, Labarna I’s father acted as city lord of Hurma. This was a prominent political position, but certainly not the most important in the Hittite kingdom. However, when Labarna I, “the old king,” took the throne after the death of his father-in-law, PU-Šarruma, he seems to have reigned from Hurma.

There are several reasons to draw this conclusion. First, Labarna I was intimately tied to the city of Hurma both before and after his reign. Growing up with his biological father as the “lord of Hurma” meant that Hurma was his hometown. Transitioning from the royal palace at Kussara to the existing royal palace at Hurma (KUB 56.56 IV 6, 20, 23, 27) would have required very little adjustments in terms of new infrastructure. Thus, there is every indication that Labarna I lived in Hurma before he took the throne.

Another piece of evidence for the close association of Labarna I with Hurma appears in one of the cult lists of the royal ancestors (CTH 661). Forlanino’s comments on this text are relevant to this discussion:

The lists therefore include kings, queens and princes who had died in the capital or whose remains had been brought to Hattuša. This may explain the omission of the first Labarna, whose main residences were Hurma and Kussar (Forlanini 2010, 117).

However, the relevant texts make no connection between Labarna I and Kussar. The behavior of other royal figures after his death further highlights his connection to Hurma instead. After he passed, his wife Tawananna ruled over Hurma, eventually staging a coup from that city.¹¹ The conclusion has generally been that Tawananna was sent to Hurma after her husband’s death. However, if Labarna I had ruled from Hurma, Tawananna need not have been sent anywhere. She would have been living with him there. When Hattušili I was appointed king by his uncle and moved the capital from Hurma to Hattuša, this would have left Hurma without a ruler. Giving the governance of the city of Hurma to his aunt, who was already closely connected with the local political scene, would have been a logical choice from a political standpoint. This would then clarify the first of the two epithets for Tawananna contained in KBo 3.28 rev. 21 and 23, which has caused scholars a great deal of confusion:

¹¹ Because there is every indication that Tawananna was the first name of this individual, the name appears without any qualifiers (Gurney 1973, 237; Bin-Nun 1975, 53–54).

aši MUNUS.LUGAL URUḪuruma É.GI4.A [...] MUNUS.LUGAL-aš DUMU.MUNUS É-TIM

This aforementioned ruling lady of the city of Hurma was a bride [...] the daughter of the house of the queen [...].

Beal (2003, 26 n. 80) objects to the more common translation, “aforementioned queen of Hurma,” on the grounds that “no such kingdom [of Hurma] is known from this period.” He instead offers his own translation, “the aforementioned queen was a bride/daughter-in-law *in* Hurma,” (Beal 2003, 26-27, emphasis mine), but quickly notes that the line contains no *INA* before *URUḪuruma*, as one might expect based on Beal’s translation.

The translation offered above has the value of answering both Beal’s concerns. The term *MUNUS.LUGAL* is used in two different senses in these two clauses. The logogram *LUGAL*, *ḫaššu-* in Hittite, can refer to a local “ruler” or “chief” in addition to a king, so *MUNUS.LUGAL* here seems to refer to a female ruler of a more circumscribed district than the kingdom itself. According to this reading, the phrase *MUNUS.LUGAL URUḪuruma* would thus be a feminine counterpart to *URUḪuruma EN-aš*, which appears in other contexts for the ruler of Hurma and was likely the title her father-in-law carried. The lack of a construct like *MUNUS.EN* in Hittite would seem to further support the possibility of this reading. Thus, the female ruler of the city is the *MUNUS.LUGAL URUḪuruma*, and the first element of this nominal sentence identifies Tawananna by her current title, “female ruler of Hurma.” It is only the second element, the predicate nominative, that highlights her relationship with the former king, Labarna I. The translation that interprets the first element of the nominal sentence as a reference to her as “queen,” an implicit reference to her relationship with Labarna I, turns the sentence into a non-sequitur.

It would therefore be helpful to unpack this epithet one term/phrase at a time. The epithet states that the female ruler of the city is “a bride,” and thereby related through marriage to the former Hittite king. In this context, the reason the father of the king did not punish her for her insubordination (as would otherwise be expected), lies in the predicate nominative and not in the subject of the verbless clause. The author then proceeds to quote a legal prohibition in which the second epithet appears. This quote follows upon and explains the previous statement, “My father had acted justly in regard to her.” The legal quotation helps explain how his actions were just and in accordance with Hittite law, “Wherever you carry away

the queen's daughter of the house, do not harm her."¹² The *DUMU.MUNUS* here is not the "daughter" of Tawananna, but Tawananna herself (contra Beal 2003, 30). She is not only a "female ruler" and the "bride" of the former king but also a member of the royal family by birth. As such, the king cannot lay a hand on her. It is in the following sentence that the author explains why the king might want to lay a hand on her in the first place: "The queen has continually rejected the one whom I place on my throne." Again, the subject of this sentence is Tawananna. However, *MUNUS.LUGAL* is unmodified. "The queen," that is, the bride of the former king who was born of royal blood, is the individual being insubordinate.

This purpose of this digression into Tawananna's titles is to highlight her role as ruler of Hurma. This role that she took following her husband's death emphasized a geographical continuity that both preceded and survived the reign of Labarna I. While it is certainly possible that Hattušili I could have appointed Tawananna to this new post by moving her from the palace at Kussara, these events make more sense if her royal residence had been at Hurma all along.

Hattušili I's choice to move the capital to Hattuša provides even more evidence of this geographical continuity.¹³ This decision has perplexed scholars for a variety of reasons. In the first place, Hattušili I had early ties to the city of Kussara, as indicated by his epithet, "Man of Kussara." (Annals I 1-3).¹⁴ Despite these close ties to the traditional capital, he nevertheless chose to relocate the capital to Hattuša. As such, Hattušili I must have had a compelling reason to uproot and move the capital from the familiarity of his hometown.

Even more perplexing than the fact that he chose to move the capital in the first place is his choice of Hattuša specifically as the new capital. This new location gave up his strategic

12 A passage in *The Palace Chronicle* fragments (KBo III 28 Obv. '10-'16) provides further evidence that this protection afforded to the royal family was embedded in the Hittite legal system. While the passage in question talks about insubordination perpetrated by a son of the king, the current passage indicates that this legal protection extended to daughters as well. The passage in question makes clear that even when the divine court (i.e., the river ordeal) has convicted the son of treason, the king may not imprison, enslave, or otherwise harm him under threat of divine punishment. Presumably, had the female ruler of Hurma not been a member of the royal family, her actions would have warranted much more severe consequences.

13 Beal (2003, 24-25) objects to the long-held notion Hattušili I was the one to transfer the capital from Kussara to Hattuša (see also, Hardy 1941, 186). He presents both literary and archeological evidence to support his objection. The archeological objections are valid, and the reconstruction given here takes account of them. The literary evidence focuses on the primacy of Hattuša in *The Tale of Zalpa*, the events of which take place before the time of Hattušili I. There is one line in *The Tale of Zalpa* that would seem to argue against Beal's interpretation. As translated by Holland and Zorman (2007, 42), "And Hattuša and the elders of Zalpa desired a son from [him] [...]" The context makes it clear that the cities are asking for a prominent position in the kingdom signified by a prince ruling their respective cities. If Hattuša was already the capital, such a request would make little sense. It is more likely that Hattuša acted as a secondary (or temporary) residence for the king, and as the staging ground for the offensive against the rebellious city of Zalpa.

14 Annals I 1-3. See below, Excursus: The Epithet, "Man of Kussara" for an exploration of the details of this connection.

advantage, which was a significant distance both from the routes into Syria (which Hattušili I would almost immediately use in his military campaigns), and from the southern Hittite vassal states, which were a continual source of friction (Bittel 1983, 19). Moreover, one can hardly mention the move without acknowledging the long-standing curse that Anitta placed on any king who resettle Hattuša (CTH 1:49-51). Despite these difficulties, Hattušili I decided to move the capital, which prompts the question of why.

This decision becomes more understandable if his predecessor, Labarna I, had already moved the capital away from Kussara. One possible impetus for this decision may have been the decline in Kussara's robustness. This could have occurred for multiple reasons, such as economic factors or unfavorable changes in weather conditions that affected the surrounding farmland or the water supply. Whatever the cause, the sudden disappearance of Kussara from the Hittite political scene suggests that it was no longer a thriving city even before Hattušili I stripped it of its political prominence (Barjamovic 2011, 144). If such were the case, as seems likely, Labarna I would also have had ample reason to move the capital to Hurma. If Hattušili I was uninterested in staying in Hurma after assuming the throne, he would have needed to choose another thriving city as his new capital. The archeological evidence at Hattuša suggests that the city had already been mostly rebuilt and resettled before he chose it as his new capital (Neve 1984, 89). The prominent role that it had already played as a secondary royal residence (as reflected in *The Tale of Zalpa*, see note 8) during his grandfather's reign would have made the choice of Hattuša much more logical.

Excursus: “Man of Kussara”

Bryce (2005, 68), along with many other Hittite scholars, considers the “Man of Kussara” epithet to be evidence that Hattušili I began his rule in Kussara and only later moved his capital to Hattuša and adopted his regnal name Hattušili I. However, if this were the case, it would seem more logical for him to have adopted the title used by his predecessors, “King of Kussara,” (Anitta Text line 1) using *LUGAL* instead of the lesser title of *LÚ*. At this point, the preceding discussion of *LÚ* + *GN* comes back into play. I have already noted that this term can mean both “native of *GN*” or “ruler of *GN*.” Both interpretations support the idea that Labarna I ruled from Hurma rather than from Kussara.

If the epithet indicates that Hattušili I was a native of Kussara, he would have adopted it to legitimate his rule by demonstrating the continuity between himself and previous Hittite rulers who reigned from Kussara. The fact that Hattušili I returned to Kussara when he became sick near the end of his life supports the notion that this is where he felt most at home, as it was where he would have spent the formative years of his life (Colophon to the *Bilingual Edict of Hattušili I*). Since Hattušili I was not a dynastic king, he wanted to emphasize a connection between himself and past rulers. His geographical roots may have been one way to accomplish this.

If, alternatively, the title indicates his role as “local ruler of Kussara,” this points to an interesting possible conclusion. If Labarna I had moved the capital to Hurma during his reign, Kussara would have needed a local ruler. His nephew, Hattušili I, would have been a reasonable choice for this position. This would then mean that Hattušili I had cut his teeth in politics as the local ruler of Kussara. It is likely that he had some political experience before taking over the throne. Furthermore, Hittite custom was for kings to assign such subordinate local positions of authority to members of their household and their extended relatives. Hattušili I could therefore have indeed ruled in Kussara before moving the capital to Hattuša. However, this would not have coincided with the beginning of his reign, but rather with his political experience before assuming the throne. That said, this reconstruction only works if Labarna I had already moved the capital from Kussara to Hurma, opening a position in Kussara.

Further support for this interpretation comes from the regnal name he chose, Hattušili I. The typical reconstruction is that he assumed the name Labarna (II) when he began to rule in Kussara and then adopted a different (or additional) name once he moved the capital to Hattuša. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that there is no evidence for other kings changing their regnal names during a reign. Kings chose regnal names at the beginning of their reigns and kept them throughout their career. In this reconstruction, Hattušili I would have begun his political career as the local ruler of Kussara, while Labarna I was ruling in Hurma. When Labarna I died and passed his throne to his nephew, the latter made a series of innovative personal and administrative decisions in concert with his coronation.

“Man of Kussara” is clearly distinct from his preceding epithet, which identified Hattušili I as the “King of the Land of Hatti.” In this context, “Man of Kussara” is not saying that Hattušili I is the local ruler of Kussara, which lies within the greater “Land of Hatti.” Rather, as kings throughout the ancient Near East did, Hattušili I established his historical roots to claim legitimacy to the throne. Dynastic kings did this by referencing their genealogy, but kings who acquired their position through other means needed other means of legitimization. Hattušili I used his native connection with the original Hittite capital, Kussara, for this purpose. Therefore, the term *LÚ URUKussara* indicates that Hattušili I was a Kussaran, which helped establish continuity between him and previous Hittite rulers.

The political prominence of Hurma during this period thus had implications that extended to the capital Hattuša itself. It is therefore helpful to explore these implications and the resulting impact they have on our understanding of negative historiography as a genre.

VI. Hurma and Negative Historiography in the Old Kingdom

The above discussion has painted a picture of the political situation that Hattušili I inherited.¹⁵ The early Hittite kings constantly needed to reestablish their authority over the prominent cities they had subjugated, as these cities regularly tested royal boundaries to establish their independence. However, the problems that Hattušili I faced were of a somewhat different nature.

When Hattušili I began to reign in Hattuša, Hurma would have still been filled with politicians with royal aspirations that became much less tangible once the capital moved to Hattuša. A united group committed to transferring power back to one of their own would have proven a formidable challenge for even the strongest and most popular of kings. From all indications, this is what Hattušili I faced with Hurma. After Tawananna was appointed the ruler of Hurma, she also began to have designs on the throne. Although she could not occupy it herself as a woman, orchestrating a coup and placing one of her own direct descendants on the throne would have secured who was genealogically closer to her than her nephew, Hattušili I, then her royal legacy and influence would not die. It is here that the prince of Puruṣhanda steps in. The threat in Hurma thus would not simply have reduced the size of Hattušili I's kingdom but would have removed him from power entirely. Recognizing the realities of this political situation provides one possible lens through which to understand the negative historiography the Old Kingdom produced.

VII. *The Tale of Zalpa* as Negative Historiography

Although Beckman limited his definition of negative historiography to *The Siege of Uršu* and *The Palace Chronicle*, there are several reasons to include *The Tale of Zalpa* in this genre.¹⁶ A brief look at this text through the lens of negative historiography should help illuminate the connections between *The Tale of Zalpa* and this genre. The first question to address regarding *The Tale of Zalpa* is the continuity of the two distinct stories in KBo 22.2. The first, confined to the upper half of the obverse of the tablet, is mythological in character, set in the city of Kaneš, and reminiscent of the Oedipus myth with its account of accidental incest. The second, confined to the reverse of the tablet, is either historical or legendary in character and set in Zalpa.

Other than the fact that these two stories appear on opposite sides of the same tablet, they might seem to have nothing in common. The duplicate fragments of this text are either confined to the first (KBo 26.126) or second story (KBo 3.38; KUB 48.79; and KUB 23.23), but do not span both. Even more telling in this regard is that KBo 3.38, which contains much of the second

15 For instance, see Yiğit (2005).

16 For additional references, see Sir Gavaz (2006); Corti (2005, 2010); Kloekhorst (2021). On *The Tale of Zalpa* and the period in which Hattuša became the capital, see de Martino (2022, 205–212, 217–219).

story, would not have room to accommodate the 20 lines of text of the first story (preserved on the obverse of KBo 22.2) in the space from the missing few lines in the upper portion of the obverse. Since several Akkadian tablets from this period demonstrate that scribes would occasionally write different texts on the obverse and reverse of tablets, both the internal and external evidence converge to indicate that KBo 22.2 contains two distinct narratives.¹⁷ Even if one believed that the missing portion of the tablet contained some narrative link between these two stories, this would most likely be the result of redactional editing, where a scribe attempted to connect an existent oral tradition (i.e., the sibling incest myth) with a military narrative.¹⁸ Either way, the composition of these two stories took place at different times, if they were ever connected at all. The focus of this discussion is therefore the identification of the second story's genre (the bulk of which is preserved on KBo 3.38) as an independent literary creation.

Just as in *The Siege of Uršu* and *The Palace Chronicle*, in this text the lackeys that the unnamed king has ordered to perform various tasks have proved not merely incompetent, but corrupt as well! The first figure is Alluwa, the king's treasurer, who plots against the king and then dies. His actions, which are described as a revolt (*hullanzannipāt*), indicate that this amounted to an attack from within the kingdom. In the aftermath, the cities of Zalpa and Hattuša make a peace treaty. As part of the treaty, the people of Zalpa ask the unnamed king to appoint one of his sons, rather than a member of his administration, to govern them. The idea may have been that a son would be less likely to revolt against his own father than a politician. Therefore, the unnamed king agrees to these terms, appointing his son Hakkarpili to the position. However, this turns out poorly for the inhabitants of Zalpa, as Hakkarpili revolts against his father anyway. Another official, Kisswa, reports Hakkarpili's actions to the king. In the broken section of the text, it appears that the king dispatches his military to deal with Hakkarpili, and we can assume they did just that, as there is no further mention of Hakkarpili. This same process repeats with Happi, another of the king's sons appointed over Zalpa. However, rather than promoting stability in his city as his father had hoped, he breeds fear and hostility, and Zalpa revolts against their Hittite king.

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17 Cf. Otten (1973, 63); Holland and Zorman (2007, 74).

18 "The mythological introduction creates a framework into which the thematically similar but apparently historical narrative of the events in Zalpa is inserted." Holland and Zorman (2007, 74).

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