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## ANCIENT HISTORY

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### HORSES IN HITTITE SOCIETY: STATUS, SYMBOLISM AND UTILITY

**Abstract:** This study examines the multifaceted role of horses in Hittite society, emphasizing their economic, military, political, and religious significance. Hittite cuneiform texts indicate that horses were primarily owned by the royal family, aristocracy, and military elite, serving as key assets in diplomacy, warfare, and state-controlled breeding programs. Legal regulations concerning horse ownership, theft, and mistreatment highlight their high economic and strategic value. Horses played a crucial role in chariotry, reinforcing both military power and royal authority. The Kikkuli Text provides insight into the sophisticated training methods employed to enhance the endurance and performance of warhorses, reflecting the Hittites' advanced equestrian knowledge. Moreover, horses held symbolic and religious importance, appearing in purification rituals and divine associations, particularly with the deity Pirwa. Royal inscriptions link chariot ownership to political stability, demonstrating the dual function of horses as both practical military assets and symbols of sovereignty. The study underscores the comprehensive integration of horses into Hittite society, illustrating their pivotal role in maintaining state power, economic stability, and religious traditions.

**Keywords:** *Hittites, Horse, Chariotry, Equine Management, Religious Symbolism*

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#### INTRODUCTION

Horse breeding played a fundamental role in the economic and cultural life of ancient societies, serving not only as a source of labor and transportation but also as a marker of prestige and social status. Horses were integral to various aspects of life, including agriculture, warfare, and ceremonial practices, enhancing both the functionality and the symbolic power of the societies that relied on them. The increasing importance of horses in social life led to their incorporation into traditions, customs, and even the identity of certain civilizations. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of the Hittites, where horses were not merely practical assets but also cultural and political symbols.

The Hittite Empire, which flourished in north-central Anatolia between approximately 1600 and 1190 BCE, emerged from a rich multicultural and multilingual foundation. Influenced by the Hatti, Hurrian, and Luwian traditions, as well as by interactions with Northern Syria and Babylon, the Hittite state developed a highly organized administrative system. This is reflected in the vast corpus of cuneiform texts discovered in the empire's capital, Hattuša (Boğazköy), which provide extensive information on the economic, military, and religious functions of horses. These texts underscore the significance of equine management within Hittite society, revealing specialized training methods, breeding practices, and the use of horses in both practical and symbolic contexts.

One of the most important sources for understanding Hittite equestrian traditions is the Kikkuli Text, an extensive manual on horse training uncovered during the early 20th-century excavations at Hattuša (Boğazköy).<sup>1</sup> Dating to the 15th–13th centuries BCE and attributed to a Mitanni horse trainer, this text details advanced conditioning programs and dietary guidelines for chariot horses, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of equine care. Additional Hittite texts (CTH 285–288) discovered after 1931 further reinforce the importance of horse breeding and training, aligning with broader equestrian traditions across Southwest Asia. The role of horses in this region is also evidenced by Middle Assyrian documents (1400–1050 BCE),<sup>2</sup> veterinary texts from Ugarit,<sup>3</sup> and Kassite<sup>4</sup> and Hurrian<sup>5</sup> sources that emphasize the economic and military value of horses during the late second millennium BCE.

This study aims to reexamine the available evidence on horses in Hittite society, offering a revised perspective on their status, functions, and broader implications. By analyzing cuneiform records, we seek to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Hittite equestrian traditions and their place within the wider context of ancient Anatolia and the Near East.

Hittite texts refer to horses using multiple linguistic terms, with the most common designation being the Sumerian ANŠE.KUR.RA,<sup>6</sup> meaning “donkey of foreign lands/mountain.” This nomenclature suggests that horses, unlike donkeys and mules, were domesticated later and likely introduced to Southwest Asia from external regions. Additional terms for horses appear in Luwian (*assu-*), Hurrian (*išši/ešši*), and Akkadian (*SISŪ[M]*),<sup>7</sup> reflecting the multilingual nature of Hittite administrative and military documentation.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond their linguistic representation, horses in Hittite sources are categorized based on age, sex, and function, with distinctions made between stallions, mares, and foals.<sup>9</sup> Further classifications exist for horses trained for specific tasks, such as harnessing, carrying loads, or pulling chariots. These systematic breeding and training processes indicate a highly developed approach to equine management, aimed at optimizing the horses’ physical capabilities for various military and economic functions.<sup>10</sup> The presence of such detailed classifications highlights the strategic importance of horse breeding in Hittite Anatolia and underscores the

civilization’s efforts to maximize the efficiency and utility of these animals.

## THE STATUS OF HORSES IN HITTITE SOCIETY

Hittite cuneiform texts indicate that horses were primarily associated with the ruling elite, the military class, and specialized equestrian professionals. Their ownership and use were largely concentrated within the aristocracy and the royal court, as reflected in their prominent role in chariot warfare, state-sponsored breeding programs, and diplomatic exchanges. Legal texts further underscore the high value attributed to horses, as specific penalties were imposed for their theft or injury. While access to horses appears to have been limited among the general population, their extensive economic and military significance suggests that they played a crucial role in reinforcing social hierarchies within Hittite society.

Members of the Hittite royal family frequently utilized horses in both ceremonial<sup>11</sup> and military<sup>12</sup> contexts. The king and other high-ranking officials rode horses during religious festivals and military campaigns, and the royal chariot, often drawn by highly trained horses, was a central feature of state processions.<sup>13</sup> Detailed descriptions of the king’s chariot and accompanying equipment provide valuable insights into the military organization and sociopolitical structure of the Hittite state. Additionally, horse-drawn carriages were the preferred mode of transportation for reaching temples and sanctuaries during cultic journeys and religious ceremonies.<sup>14</sup> The use of horses and chariots by the royal family in both warfare and religious rituals symbolically reinforced their status, power, and divine legitimacy.

The regulations concerning horse ownership, as recorded in Hittite cuneiform texts, underscore the economic, social, and political significance of horses within the empire. More than just valuable assets in trade and transportation, horses played a crucial role in military and agricultural activities, making their ownership, breeding, sale, and leasing subject to strict legal oversight. The Hittite legal corpus, particularly CTH 291–292, provides detailed provisions on these matters, including price classifications, penalties for theft or mistreatment, and mechanisms for resolving disputes. These laws not only reflect the structured legal system of the Hittite civilization but also indicate that horse breeding was a highly regulated, state-supervised activity. Moreover, the texts reveal the dual function of horses in both commercial and military spheres, illustrating their integral role in sustaining economic power and reinforcing political authority.

The detailed regulations on horse ownership demonstrate the level of state control over livestock management. This suggests that the Hittite legal system aimed to ensure stability in agricultural production, trade, and military logistics

<sup>1</sup> CTH 284: The texts were first published by POTRATZ (1938a). KAMMENHUBER (1961) republished the Kikkuli text with some philological comments, comparing it with Hittite texts on horse training.

<sup>2</sup> EBELING 1951; BALKAN 1951.

<sup>3</sup> GORDON 1942.

<sup>4</sup> BALKAN 1954.

<sup>5</sup> SODEN 1957; see also SALONEN 1955; KAMMENHUBER 1988; STARKE 2000.

<sup>6</sup> RÜSTER/NEU 1989: 242.

<sup>7</sup> HAAS 2003: 433–434.

<sup>8</sup> For discussions on the domestication of the horse and its arrival in Southwest Asia, see POTRATZ 1938b; AZZAROLI 1958; KAMMENHUBER 1988; HORN 1995; HYLAND 2003.

<sup>9</sup> For relevant names and references, see ERTEM 1965.

<sup>10</sup> KREBS 1967; HOUT 2004; BALZA 2013. While the texts do not provide detailed information on specific horse breeds, they indicate that high-quality horses were imported into Hittite territories (KBo 1.10 Rs. 62 ff.). However, the frequency and necessity of these imports remain unclear due to the limited available evidence (ERTEM 1965).

<sup>11</sup> KUB 7.25 Vs. I 3–10; the king’s draught horse: KUB 34.26 Rs. 3.

<sup>12</sup> KUB 14.15 Rs. III 39–40, 16 Rs. III; 10.3 Vs. I 11; 30.41 I Rs. 2–3; see also ERTEM 1965; NEU 1998.

<sup>13</sup> GÜTERBOCK/VAN DEN HOUT 1991. See also IBoT 1.36 Rs. III 55–59. CTH 486 Rs. 16–22; KUB 31.71 Vs. III 1–34; ANŠE.KUR.RA *turiya*- KBo 6.3 III 48, 51; KBo 6.26 II 38.

<sup>14</sup> KBo 10.20 I 17; KUB 20.96 Vs. III 12 ff.; KUB 20.94 IV 6; KBo 11.43 Vs. I 21; KUB 10.91 II 2–6.

by protecting the economic value of horses and preventing disputes over ownership.

Accordingly, under a general nomenclature, the price of a horse was fourteen shekels of silver, a draught horse (ANŠE.KUR.RA *turiya*-) twenty shekels of silver, a one-year-old male foal (ANŠE.KUR.RA *iuga*-) ten shekels of silver, a mare (ANŠE.KUR.RA MUNUS.AL.LÁ *iuga*) fifteen shekels of silver,<sup>15</sup> the weaned foal (ANŠE.KUR.RA NITÁ *šauitiš*-) and the weaned mare (ANŠE.KUR.RA MUNUS.AL.LÁ *šauitiš*-) were priced at four shekels of silver.<sup>16</sup> Although the price of the male horse (ANŠE.KUR.RA NITÁ) and the mare (ANŠE.KUR.RA MUNUS.AL.LÁ) is not specified, the phrase “the price is exactly the same” in the text refers to the price of a calf whose name appears before the horses mentioned. It seems that the price of two shekels of silver may have been taken into account.<sup>17</sup> Price differences should be determined according to factors such as the physical characteristics of the horses, their intended use, and the difficulty of the breeding process. According to the prices in the legal texts, the draft horse is the most economically valuable of the horses. This must indicate that these animals are of vital importance when used for transport. These horses must have characteristics such as speed, strength, and endurance, which makes the process of raising and training them more costly and laborious. However, the price of this animal is much lower than the price of 1 mina of silver, which is the price of a mule.<sup>18</sup> The lower price of draught horses compared to mules may indicate that mules, being hybrids with specific traits like greater endurance and adaptability, were considered more valuable in long-distance transportation and heavy labor. This economic distinction suggests that mules were relatively scarce or required specialized breeding techniques that increased their market value.

After the harness horse, the most valuable horse is the mare. It can be said that what makes them valuable is their reproductive ability. It can be assumed that the sale of horses was a commercial act, since in another text, the merchants listed horses among the animals they sold.<sup>19</sup> It is also mentioned that there was a penalty for tampering with these commercial sales<sup>20</sup> and that the owner of the horse branded it as proof of ownership.<sup>21</sup> In examples outside the legal texts, members of the royal family could also own horses<sup>22</sup> or assign horses to high-ranking officials.<sup>23</sup> Merchants could also own horses and horses could carry loads in their caravans.<sup>24</sup> Another indication of the role of horses in economic life is that they could be rented. In the legal texts, a horse owner could rent his horse and receive 1 shekel of silver as rent for one month.<sup>25</sup>

In Hittite Anatolia, horses were an important economic asset and their theft was a crime. It was demanded that

horses should not be stolen in the treaties between the states.<sup>26</sup> Penalties for theft or damage to purchased or rented horses are detailed in the legal texts. For example, in the case of the theft of a mare, the penalty was previously thirty horses, but with the revision of the law, is now fifteen horses, of which five must be two years old, five must be one year old and five must be weaned.<sup>27</sup> If the stolen horse is a draught horse, the stealer must give ten horses as punishment, of which three are two years old, three are one year old and four are weaned.<sup>28</sup> This criminal sanction, which seems to be in line with the law’s regulation of the value of the horse, affects the value attached to the draught horse and its use. It can be argued that this is an indication of its importance in transport work. Criminal penalties for the theft of harnesses and horses are set out in the law. For example, the penalty for stealing a horse’s harness used to be one mina of silver, but with the renewal of the laws, 12 shekels of silver were set to be paid.<sup>29</sup> The same law states that the horse (or mule) was harnessed to the cart with a leather halter, bit and bronze bell. In addition to the theft of a horse, the law also provides for criminal sanctions in the event of a horse being seized by force. If the horse is taken by force by a person other than its owner, it is stipulated that both the dead body of the horse and the fee determined by law should be paid to the owner.<sup>30</sup> If the horse ends up in someone else’s stable, there is no crime of theft if the owner retrieves the horse without damage.<sup>31</sup> If a lost horse was found, it should be brought to the “King’s Gate”, and if it was found in the country, it should be brought to the “Council of Elders”.<sup>32</sup> In this arrangement, the person who finds the horse can apply to the said authorities and use the horse at their own disposal until the owner of the horse is found. Otherwise, it is a case of theft. Removing the mark of ownership from a stolen or seized horse is also considered a crime of theft by the law, and seven horses in total, including two two-year-old horses, three one-year-old horses and two weaned horses, must be handed over by the offender to the horse’s owner.<sup>33</sup> This provision highlights the importance of branding in property rights enforcement and suggests that the Hittite legal system placed significant emphasis on preventing fraud in horse ownership and trade.

The legal texts also provide for criminal sanctions in cases where horses are mistreated. Thus, if a rented horse dies as a result of being forced to work hard or being loaded with a load too heavy for the horse to carry, this situation is compensated by giving the horse owner the same horse, but if the horse dies of natural causes, it has been determined that no compensation is required.<sup>34</sup> It is forbidden to inflict violence on a horse so as to cause a rented pregnant mare to miscarry her foal, and two shekels must be paid for this offence.<sup>35</sup> In the same regulation, the penalty for blinding a horse is six shekels of silver, which is three times the penalty

<sup>15</sup> §180: KBo 6.26 II 38–41.

<sup>16</sup> §181: KBo 6.26 II 42–43.

<sup>17</sup> §178: KBo 6.26 II 34–35.

<sup>18</sup> §180: KBo 6.26 II 39.

<sup>19</sup> KUB 13.35 Vs. III 23–24.

<sup>20</sup> §148: KBo 6.10 Rs. III 25–27.

<sup>21</sup> §61: KBo 6.3 III 40.

<sup>22</sup> CTH 293 1–4; KUB 31.71 Vs. III 1–34; KUB 13.35 III 18–26.

<sup>23</sup> KBo 1.3 I 8 ff.; KBo 5.7 Vs. I 23, Rs.

<sup>24</sup> KBo 7.42 Rs. III 2–8.

<sup>25</sup> §152: KBo 6.10 III 37–38.

<sup>26</sup> KUB 23.72 Rs. 55–56.

<sup>27</sup> §58: KBo 6.3. III 30–34.

<sup>28</sup> §64: 6.3 III 48.

<sup>29</sup> §129: KBo 6.10 II 26–29.

<sup>30</sup> §76: KBo 6.3 Rs III 76–77.

<sup>31</sup> §66: KBo 6.3 III 51–54.

<sup>32</sup> §71: KBo 6.2 III 58–63.

<sup>33</sup> §61: KBo 6.3 III 40–42.

<sup>34</sup> §73: KBo 6.3 III 73–75.

<sup>35</sup> §77: KBo 6.3 III 78–80, IV 1–2.

for miscarrying the horse. Another offence that may be considered to fall within the scope of animal harm is animal rape. Accordingly, although the law states that the rape of a horse is a punishable offence, no fine is imposed on the offender, and the offender is deprived of religious purity and cannot become a priest.<sup>36</sup> The varying penalties for harm to horses suggest a hierarchical valuation of different types of injuries. The severe penalty for blinding a horse implies that a permanently disabled horse was considered an irreparable economic loss, whereas a miscarried foal, while a setback, did not render the mare useless for future reproduction.

The legal texts provide information on where the horses were kept. For example, a ploughing ox, a draught horse, a cow and a pack donkey are kept in a place called the *hali*.<sup>37</sup> Hittite *hali*- refers to a surrounded fold.<sup>38</sup> A second place where horses were kept is mentioned in the Kikkuli Text. The text stipulates that the horses are kept in the “coachman’s house”,<sup>39</sup> which is called É LÚIŠ. The relationship between the words *hali*- and É LÚIŠ is not clear. The existence of distinct terms for horse enclosures may indicate a differentiation in their function. While *hali*- may have been a general stable for work animals, É LÚIŠ appears to be a more specialized facility, likely associated with military or elite transport purposes.

The comprehensive legal regulations concerning horse ownership in Hittite law reflect the economic, military, and social importance of horses. These laws not only defined property rights and commercial transactions but also established strict penalties for theft and mistreatment. The structured pricing system, legal provisions for leasing, and welfare regulations demonstrate the sophistication of Hittite economic and legal institutions. The depth of these legal regulations suggests that horses were considered a strategic asset, essential for sustaining both economic productivity and military readiness. The penalties for theft and mistreatment indicate a legal framework designed to maintain the integrity of horse ownership, ensuring both economic stability and societal order.

## HORSE BREEDING AND EQUINE SPECIALISTS IN HITTITE SOCIETY

In Hittite society, horse breeding was a state-regulated and state-supported activity of significant economic and strategic importance. Horses played a crucial role both in military operations and in the broader economic framework of the kingdom. As a result, their care, training, and overall well-being were matters of professional expertise. The individuals involved in equine management occupied a distinct position within the social hierarchy and held notable economic significance. These specialists primarily operated under the authority of the palace and the military, reflecting the centralized control over horse breeding and chariotry.

Hittite cuneiform texts provide evidence of various professional titles related to horse breeding and management, though their exact functions are not always clearly defined. One such term, LÚ/ LÚ<sup>MEŠ</sup> ANŠE.KUR.RA, appears in ritual

texts concerning epidemics<sup>40</sup> in the army and in protocol texts.<sup>41</sup> Although its precise meaning is uncertain, scholars suggest an equivalence with LÚ<sup>MEŠ</sup> aššuššanni-, the “horse trainer” mentioned in the Kikkuli Text, a well-known manual on horse training.<sup>42</sup>

Another title, LÚ/MUNUS/LÚ<sup>MEŠ</sup> UMMEDA ANŠE.KUR.RA, which is rarely attested in Hittite cuneiform, is translated as “Horse Keeper.”<sup>43</sup> This designation appears in texts describing the training of horses by palace officials.<sup>44</sup> In one such document, the official is recorded as washing his hands before wiping the horses’ faces with water and covering them with blankets—an action that provides insight into the duties associated with this title. Based on these descriptions, the term may be more accurately understood as “Horse Keeper/Trainer.” Additionally, land grant documents mention individuals with this title who were employed by private individuals, suggesting that equine specialists also operated outside direct state control.<sup>45</sup> Another equine-related title appears in cult inventories as LÚ/LÚ<sup>MEŠ</sup> SIPA(D) ANŠE.KUR.RA,<sup>46</sup> which translates as “Horse Herder.”<sup>47</sup> These officials were responsible for grazing horses in designated meadows, as recorded in religious and administrative texts.<sup>48</sup> Their role highlights the structured and organized approach the Hittite state took in maintaining and managing its equine resources.

Alongside professional horse breeding, chariotry was a fundamental component of Hittite military strategy and social organization. Individuals who served in chariot units held various titles, reflecting their roles, status, and expertise. The hierarchical structure of chariot personnel underscores the professional and organized nature of the Hittite army.<sup>49</sup>

The term ANŠE.KUR.RA<sup>MEŠ/HIA</sup> is used both in its basic sense as “horse/horses” and in the context of “horse troops” or “chariot warriors.”<sup>50</sup> The title EN ANŠE.KUR.RA<sup>MEŠ</sup> translates as “Commander of Horses” or “Commander of Mounted Troops,” indicating a leadership position within the cavalry or chariot forces.<sup>51</sup> Other related designations include LÚGIŠ.GIGIR (“Charioteers”), ERÍN.MEŠ<sup>GIŠ</sup>GIGIR<sup>HIA</sup> (“Chariot Troops”), and ERÍN.MEŠ ANŠE.KUR.RA<sup>MEŠ/HIA</sup> (“Chariot Troops”), which appear in Hittite texts referring to military personnel associated with chariots. The hierarchical

<sup>40</sup> KUB 7.54 II 15–17.

<sup>41</sup> KUB 26.16 Col. d. 12.

<sup>42</sup> RAULWING 2000, 114–115; see also PECCHIOLI-DADDI 1982.

<sup>43</sup> KAMMENHUBER 1961, 179; PECCHIOLI-DADDI 1982, 19.

<sup>44</sup> KUB 29.40 II 13.

<sup>45</sup> KBo 5.7 Rs. 23, 27, Vs. 3, 13, Vs. 42.

<sup>46</sup> KUB 48.105 Rs. 36–37.

<sup>47</sup> PECCHIOLI-DADDI 1982, 19.

<sup>48</sup> KUB 48.105+KBo 12.53 Vs. 37.

<sup>49</sup> The ancient Near Eastern chariot, a light, two-wheeled vehicle, was primarily used for warfare, enhancing the Hittite army’s effectiveness in battle (RAULWING/BURMEISTER 2012). The soldiers who drove the horse-drawn chariots in the Hittite army were known by various titles, reflecting their roles and status. The <sup>GIŠ</sup>GIGIR mentioned in Hittite cuneiform texts is a two-wheeled light chariot drawn by horses. These chariots were used for important military campaigns or royal ceremonies. The word can therefore be used in a broad sense to refer to any kind of chariot (FRIEDRICH 1952, 273; RÜSTER/NEU 1989, 320, see also HAGENBUCHNER 2004, 361–372).

<sup>50</sup> FRIEDRICH 1952, 265; HOUWINK TEN CATE 1984, 60; RÜSTER/NEU 1989, 307; TISCHLER 2001, 213; “chariot corps”, ALP 1991, 149, 421; “chariots, wagons and troops”, BEAL 1992, 244–245.

<sup>51</sup> ALP 2001, 154.

<sup>36</sup> §200: KBo 6.26 IV 23–25.

<sup>37</sup> §66: KBo 6.3 III 51–54.

<sup>38</sup> PUHVEL 1991, 26–28.

<sup>39</sup> KAMMENHUBER 1961, 355; FRIEDRICH 1952, 270.

structure of chariot personnel within the Hittite army demonstrates the critical role of chariotry in military strategy. The distinction between general chariot warriors and highly specialized officers suggests a multi-tiered command system, in which expertise and rank played a decisive role.

While these titles denote general chariot-related roles, more specialized ranks existed for officers with distinct responsibilities. The Hittite word *išmeriya-*, meaning “bridle” or “harness,” forms the basis of <sup>LÚ</sup>*išmeriya* (KUŠKA.TAB.ANŠE), which is translated as “Bridle-Holder” or “Chariot Driver.”<sup>52</sup> There appears to have been a hierarchical structure within this category, as certain individuals held superior ranks. Titles such as <sup>LÚ</sup>*išmeriya išha/EN* and <sup>LÚ</sup>*išmeriya BELU* refer to high-ranking officials “in charge of the chariot.”<sup>53</sup> This role is equated with ŠA <sup>KUŠ</sup>KIR<sub>4</sub>.TAB.ANŠE, a prestigious military title that could also be held by members of the royal family, highlighting the political significance of chariot warfare.<sup>54</sup>

Additionally, the Akkadian term <sup>LÚ</sup>KARTAPPU, meaning “Chariot Driver,”<sup>55</sup> is found in Hittite texts, further illustrating the cross-cultural importance of chariotry in the ancient Near East. A high-ranking official, <sup>GAL</sup>KARTAPPÍ, is identified as the “Head of the Chariot Drivers,”<sup>56</sup> a title that was also held by some members of the royal family.<sup>57</sup> Notably, the fact that members of the royal family held high-ranking chariot-related titles, such as <sup>GAL</sup>KARTAPPÍ, indicates that chariotry was not merely a battlefield function but also a domain of political prestige. This suggests that proficiency in chariot warfare and equine management was an essential skill for the ruling elite, reinforcing their legitimacy and authority. The dual role of chariots as both a military asset and a political tool aligns with broader Near Eastern trends, where elite warriors often held positions of governance.

## THE ROLE OF HORSE BREEDING AND CHARIOTRY IN HITTITE MILITARY POWER

The military dominance of the Hittite Empire in the Near East during the 14th century BCE was closely linked to its advancements in horse breeding and chariot warfare.<sup>58</sup> The rapid territorial expansion of the Hittites, from their capital Hattuša to Northern Syria, necessitated strong military capabilities and logistical support.<sup>59</sup> Although horses are not always explicitly mentioned in all historical accounts, the military success of the Hittites strongly suggests that systematic horse breeding and training played a crucial role in their strategic advantage. Chariots, which symbolized superiority over the enemy, were essential not only for their speed and tactical efficiency but also as a demonstration of military prestige and state power. This dual function of chariots—as both a military tool and a political symbol—illustrates how warfare and governance were deeply intertwined in Hittite society.

Hittite historical records, such as the annals of Muršili II, indicate that the number of chariots possessed by the ruler was directly linked to the strength of the state. In these annals, enemy states attempted to undermine the authority of the young king by highlighting that he had fewer chariots than his father.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Hattušili III, while listing his conquered territories, emphasized his control over the chariots of these lands.<sup>61</sup> This demonstrates that military power was not only measured in terms of army size but also in the capacity to field and maintain advanced military units, such as chariot divisions. Furthermore, it highlights the psychological aspect of warfare, where perception and propaganda played a role in legitimizing a ruler’s authority.

Horses bred for chariot warfare required specialized training distinct from those raised for other purposes. They needed to be physically strong enough to pull heavy chariots, possess high endurance to sustain prolonged military engagements, and be responsive to commands in the chaotic environment of battle. This required a rigorous and systematic approach to their conditioning.

Several Hittite cuneiform texts discuss horse training, with the Kikkuli Text being the most detailed and comprehensive.<sup>62</sup> Other related texts, such as CTH 285 (Ritualized Instructional Texts on Horse Training), CTH 286 (Hittite Texts on Horse Training), and CTH 287 (Fragments on Horse Training), provide additional insights into equine management, even if not always explicitly focused on military applications. The existence of multiple texts dedicated to horse training suggests that equine management was not just a minor aspect of Hittite military logistics but a systematically studied and documented practice, possibly reflecting the influence of specialized professional trainers within the state.

The Kikkuli Text, attributed to Kikkuli, a horse trainer (<sup>LÚ</sup>*aššuššanni-*) of Mitanni origin,<sup>63</sup> reveals the influence of foreign expertise on Hittite equestrian practices.<sup>64</sup> The Mitanni, a Hurrian-speaking state in northern Mesopotamia and Syria, were renowned for their advanced horse breeding and training techniques. The Hittite adoption of these methods demonstrates their openness to external influences and their pursuit of military excellence.<sup>65</sup> This also shows that military innovation in the ancient world was not always a product of isolated development but often resulted from cultural exchange and adaptation. The Hittites’ willingness to learn from others highlights their pragmatic approach to warfare.

The Kikkuli Text consists of four tablets detailing an extensive 184-day training regimen designed to enhance the endurance and performance of chariot horses. The instructions cover:<sup>66</sup>

– Diet and Nutrition: Horses were fed a mixture of wheat, barley, and hay at regular intervals. Due to their high energy needs, their diet was carefully managed, and at night, a feed

<sup>52</sup> ÜNAL 2016, 233, 266.

<sup>53</sup> FRIEDRICH 1952, 88.

<sup>54</sup> BEAL 1992, 154–162; see also SIMON 2017.

<sup>55</sup> TISCHLER 2001, 281; ALP 2001, 197; SCHULER 1965, 146.

<sup>56</sup> OTTEN 1989, 28.

<sup>57</sup> BİLGİN 2019, 231.

<sup>58</sup> BRYCE 2005; see also RAULWING/MEYER 2004.

<sup>59</sup> BEAL 1992; ATILA 2018.

<sup>60</sup> KUB 19.29 Rs. IV16–20.

<sup>61</sup> CTH 81 II 8 58–61.

<sup>62</sup> CTH 284: POTRATZ 1938a, KAMMENHUBER 1961; see also RAULWING 2005.

<sup>63</sup> KUB 1.13 I 1–2: KAMMENHUBER 1961.

<sup>64</sup> HROZNÝ 1931; KAMMENHUBER 1988.

<sup>65</sup> MOOREY 1989.

<sup>66</sup> MASSON 1988; NYLAND 1993; RAULWING/MEYER 2004.

bag was placed in their mouths to ensure continuous digestion and sustained energy levels.

– Water Regulation: Horses were sometimes deprived of water for a full day to improve their resilience. Conversely, their salt levels were replenished through salt water and malt water consumption, compensating for minerals lost through sweating.

– Bathing and Recovery: Horses were frequently bathed in rivers to maintain their skin health, cool their bodies, and aid in muscle recovery.

– Physical Conditioning: The training included a combination of short sprints to improve speed and muscle strength and long-distance runs to build endurance and mental resilience.

– Training Facilities: Horses were kept in a pre-cleaned stable (“coachman’s house,” É LÚIŠ) and confined in boat-shaped huts, where they were given continuous access to food.

In the Kikkuli text, horses are released to graze in the meadows in autumn.<sup>67</sup> Similar information is found in a funeral ritual in which oxen, sheep, horses (and) mules graze in the meadow of the Sun God.<sup>68</sup> According to the Kikkuli text, the horses not only grazed in the meadows but were also fed with fodder. Due to their high energy requirements and the decline of the pastures in autumn, horses were fed with a mixture of wheat, barley and hay.<sup>69</sup> The content of the feed mixture did not change, but the horses were fed several times a day at regular intervals, and in the evening, a feed bag was placed in their mouths.<sup>70</sup> This relieved their digestive system and provided constant energy. The fodder mixture mentioned in the text also appears in a magic ritual. According to this text, horses were fed with a fodder mixture containing barley.<sup>71</sup> As part of the diet, horses were sometimes left without water for a whole day, and sometimes the salt excreted from their bodies by the horses sweating in the hot stables was compensated by making them drink salt water and malt water.<sup>72</sup> These practices, usually used to improve the performance and endurance of horses, can help to maximise their physical capacity. The text mentions that horses were bathed in the river several times a day, sometimes consecutively.<sup>73</sup> Washing has many benefits, both for the general health of the horse and for its performance. During intense training under Kikkuli’s guidance, horses sweat and get dirty. Regular washing maintains the health of the horse’s skin by removing this sweat and dirt and can also help to relax and loosen the muscles, speeding up muscle recovery, especially after intense training. This suggests that the Hittites understood not only the importance of training but also post-training recovery, which is a key factor in maintaining long-term performance.

In the Kikkuli texts, it is mentioned that the harnessed horses should be run fast over long distances and galloped over short distances.<sup>74</sup> The purpose of these short, fast

runs was to increase the horses’ speed and strengthen their muscles. Long-distance runs, on the other hand, developed the horses’ physical and mental endurance and patience. Kikkuli’s instructions also mention a technical detail about horse training. In the text, the horses are kept for ten days in a pre-cleaned “coachman’s house”,<sup>75</sup> referred to in the text as É LÚIŠ, and confined in a boat-shaped hut. Fodder is poured on one side of the horses and washed grain on the other, which they eat continuously.<sup>76</sup>

## THE ROLE OF HORSES IN HITTITE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The Hittite religious system was characterized by a complex interplay between humans, animals, and deities, with ritual practices structured around hierarchical relationships within these interactions.<sup>77</sup> Animals, particularly horses, played a significant role in Hittite religious traditions, appearing in a wide range of rituals, magical ceremonies, and literary texts.<sup>78</sup> Their presence in religious practices underscores their symbolic and functional importance within the Hittite worldview.

Horses were prominently featured in Hittite religious thought, particularly in rituals, festivals, and mythological contexts. Several deities were associated with equine symbolism, though the extent of these connections varied. The goddesses Ištar, Malliya, Kamrušepa, and Aškašepa were referenced in texts that mention horses; however, their relationship with horses remained limited.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, Pirwa was explicitly recognized as a deity linked to horses and horse breeding. Offerings and rituals dedicated to Pirwa aimed to ensure the health, strength, and fertility of horses. The gender of Pirwa remains ambiguous, with scholarly interpretations ranging from a male god<sup>80</sup> to a female goddess<sup>81</sup> or even a dual-gendered deity.<sup>82</sup> The fact that Pirwa’s gender is ambiguous suggests a fluidity in divine representations, which may indicate that the deity’s role was more functional than strictly defined by gender norms.

The significance of Pirwa in Hittite religious institutions is further attested in administrative records. Cult inventories (CTH 527.49) describe a metal statue of Pirwa standing on horses and holding a whip, emphasizing the deity’s close association with equine practices.<sup>83</sup> The whip in Pirwa’s hand is particularly significant, as it likely symbolizes control, mastery, and the ability to harness the power of horses, reflecting broader themes of dominion and order in Hittite religious thought. Additionally, references to institutions such as <sup>NA4</sup>hekur Pirwa and É.GAL hékur Pirwa<sup>84</sup> suggest that

<sup>67</sup> KUB 1.13 I 3–4.

<sup>68</sup> KUB 30.24 Vs. II 3–4.

<sup>69</sup> KUB 1.13 I 9–11.

<sup>70</sup> KUB 1.13 I 20–36.

<sup>71</sup> KBo 10.37 Vs. II 15–17.

<sup>72</sup> KUB 1.13 I 26–39, Rs. III 32–35.

<sup>73</sup> KUB 1.13 I 37–39.

<sup>74</sup> KUB 1.13 I 4–16, 37–42.

<sup>75</sup> FRIEDRICH 1952, 270; KAMMENHUBER 1961, 355.

<sup>76</sup> KUB 1.13 Rs. III 10–15. For a detailed discussion, see ÜNAL 2013.

<sup>77</sup> ROOS 2007.

<sup>78</sup> HAAS 1994.

<sup>79</sup> For the relationship of the goddesses to horses, see BRANDENSTEIN 1943, 58–59; LAROCHE 1946, 67.

<sup>80</sup> PECCHIOLI-DADDI 2005; ÜNAL 2013, 51.

<sup>81</sup> BRANDENSTEIN 1943, 58; LAROCHE 1946, 87.

<sup>82</sup> ÖZGÜÇ 1965, 26.

<sup>83</sup> KUB 38.4 Vs. 1–11, see also GÜTERBOCK 1943, 288–289; ÜNAL 2013, 53–55. Similar information is repeated in a ritual text for the Sun Goddess of the Earth: KBo 15.16 + KBo 10.52 Vs. II 3.

<sup>84</sup> PUHVEL 1991; ÜNAL 2013, 55–56; ÜNAL 2019; KIRÇİL 2021.

economic and administrative entities were dedicated to the deity. These institutions, which enjoyed tax-exempt status under royal decree,<sup>85</sup> likely played a role in both religious and economic functions, paralleling the role of temples as centers of production and resource management.<sup>86</sup> This highlights how religious and economic spheres were closely intertwined in Hittite society, with religious institutions actively contributing to economic sustainability and infrastructure.

Horses were deeply embedded in Hittite ritual practices, particularly in purification and substitution ceremonies. While the direct sacrifice of horses is debated, textual evidence suggests their involvement in various ceremonial functions. In funerary rites, for example, the heads of cattle and horses were burned on the seventh day of royal funeral ceremonies,<sup>87</sup> though there is no explicit reference to horse sacrifice.<sup>88</sup> However, on the eighth or ninth day, cattle, sheep, mules, and horses were slaughtered at a spring, suggesting that horses might have been ritually offered to the gods.<sup>89</sup> The fact that horse sacrifice is rare in Hittite texts, in contrast to other animals, may suggest that horses were viewed as too valuable for frequent ritual killing. Instead, their primary ritual function might have been as living participants in ceremonies rather than sacrificial victims. A fragmented tablet from a magical ritual in Kizzuwatna may provide the only direct evidence of horse sacrifice,<sup>90</sup> but the incomplete nature of the text prevents definitive conclusions.

Horses also played an important role in purification and protective rituals. Both real horses and figurines (made of wood or clay) were employed in ceremonies designed to cleanse individuals of impurity or ward off evil. In a ritual dedicated to the Sun Goddess of the Earth (CTH 448.4.3.b), wooden horses and human figurines were used as symbolic substitutes for the king and queen, reinforcing the protective and purificatory role of horses in religious practice.<sup>91</sup> This suggests that horses were believed to have an inherent spiritual capacity for absorbing and transferring negative energies, a concept similar to ritual scapegoats in other ancient traditions. Similarly, the Sea Ritual (CTH 436.B) incorporated clay chariots, horses, and human figures in a comparable symbolic function.<sup>92</sup>

Purification rituals frequently incorporated horses in both physical and symbolic forms. The Pupuwanni Purification Ritual (CTH 408) employed clay figures of gods, chariots, and horses to cleanse the ritual owner of sin.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, the Ummaya Purification Ritual involved symbolic representations of horses and chariots to remove impurity,<sup>94</sup> though the material composition of these objects is not specified. A particularly striking example of ritual purification appears in the Ritual for Goddess Pirinkir (CTH 644), in which live

horses were driven between the halves of a split dog and through fire—an act likely intended to sanctify and ritually purify the animals used in chariotry.<sup>95</sup>

Beyond purification, horses were also incorporated into birth rituals. In the Papanikri Birth Ritual (CTH 476), clay horse figurines and wooden chariots were employed to remove curses and negative influences during childbirth,<sup>96</sup> reinforcing the association between horses and sacred cleansing.

Horses were integral to Hittite festival traditions, serving as sacred transport for deities and royalty. In the Festival for the Goddess Tetešhapi (CTH 738), the deity's statue was transported to the ceremonial site in a chariot pulled by horses, a practice that emphasized the goddess's divine authority and sacred presence.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, during the AN.TAH.ŠUM<sup>SAR</sup> Festival<sup>98</sup> and *nuntarriyašhaš* Festival,<sup>99</sup> the king and royal family traveled in horse-drawn chariots, reinforcing the symbolic connection between divine rule and equine transportation.

Horse races also featured prominently in festival celebrations. According to festival texts, horses were prepared by the king and consecrated for racing events.<sup>100</sup> These competitions functioned as both entertainment and religious spectacle, with prizes awarded to the winners.<sup>101</sup> The AN.TAH.ŠUM<sup>SAR</sup> text explicitly designates competing horses as “race-horses,” though it does not specify the location of these races.<sup>102</sup> However, other Hittite texts refer to racecourses known as ANŠE.KUR.RA *wahannaš/wehuwaš*, indicating that the competitions took place on circular tracks or hippodromes.<sup>103</sup> The term *wahannaš/wehuwaš*, derived from the verb *wah-* (“to turn”), suggests that the races involved a structured track with turning points.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In Hittite society, horses were not merely economic or military assets but also played a crucial role in reinforcing social hierarchies. Hittite cuneiform texts indicate that horses were predominantly owned by the royal family, the aristocracy, and the military elite, highlighting their centrality in diplomatic exchanges, state-sponsored breeding programs, and warfare. The meticulous regulation of horse pricing, strict property laws, and severe penalties for theft or mistreatment underscore the significant economic and strategic value attributed to horses within the Hittite state.

The extensive legal provisions concerning horses reflect the state's firm control over breeding and trade. While horses were indispensable not only in warfare but also in agricultural and transport activities, their training and breeding—particularly for chariotry and ceremonial purposes—were highly specialized and state-supervised. The imposition of strict penalties for horse theft and abuse further illustrates

<sup>85</sup> KBo 6.28+KUB 26.48 Rs. 18–22, see also MARTINO 2022.

<sup>86</sup> LÚ<sup>ME5</sup> É *hēkur Pirwa*: KUB 27.13 IV 17–18, KBo 10.10 Vs. II 13, KUB 55.1 II 8.

<sup>87</sup> KUB XXX 25+XXXIV 68 + XXXLX 4 Vs. 19, KUB XXXIX 14 Vs. I 14: OTTEN 1958.

<sup>88</sup> GOETZE 1957, 171.

<sup>89</sup> KUB XXX 24a + XXXIV 65 I Vs. 3–5, see also OTTEN 1958.

<sup>90</sup> KUB 39.56 1. ff: ÜNAL 2013.

<sup>91</sup> KBo 15.16 Vs. II 2–8.

<sup>92</sup> IBoT 3.93 + KBo 15.21 I 7–9.

<sup>93</sup> IBoT 2.115 + KBo 15.22 + KUB 41.3 Vs. I 1–4.

<sup>94</sup> KBo 15.1 II 5–15.

<sup>95</sup> ÖZTÜRK 2023.

<sup>96</sup> KBo 5.1 II 38–39, 46–49.

<sup>97</sup> KUB 11.32 IV 1–19.

<sup>98</sup> CTH 604: KBo 10.20 I 4–6.

<sup>99</sup> CTH 626: KBo 10.43 Vs. I 26–27.

<sup>100</sup> KBo 10.20 Vs. II 11–13, III 7–11.

<sup>101</sup> KBo 9.91 Rs. B 4 4.

<sup>102</sup> *pittiyawaš* ANŠE.KUR.RA: KBo 10.20 Vs. II 13.

<sup>103</sup> ÜNAL 2013, 51.

the state's commitment to preserving this vital resource, emphasizing its economic and military significance.

Equine specialists, including breeders, trainers, and charioteers affiliated with the royal court, held esteemed positions within Hittite society. Chariot warriors were not only military figures but also members of the ruling elite, signifying that horses and chariotry were as much symbols of governance and prestige as they were instruments of warfare. This integration of equine management into the sociopolitical framework highlights the multifaceted role of horses in sustaining Hittite state authority.

The Hittites' systematic approach to horse breeding and training was a fundamental aspect of their military power and administrative organization. Sources such as the Kikkuli Text demonstrate that horse training was regarded as a structured discipline, adhering to well-defined methodologies. The sophistication of Hittite equestrian knowledge suggests that they not only developed advanced techniques but also actively engaged with external influences, such as those from the Mitanni, to enhance their expertise in equine management and chariot warfare.

The strategic significance of horses and chariots extended beyond the battlefield; they also served as potent political symbols. Hittite royal texts, particularly those of Muršili II and Hattušili III, explicitly associate the number of chariots possessed by a ruler with political stability and military supremacy. This correlation underscores the dual function of chariots as both practical military assets and emblems of sovereign power.

Beyond their military and political roles, horses held religious and ritual significance in Hittite society. Deities such as Pirwa, associated with horses, reflect the sacred dimension of these animals in the Hittite belief system. Horses were employed in purification rites, sacrificial rituals, and divination practices, emphasizing their spiritual value. Their use in royal ceremonies and festivals further demonstrates their integral role not only in daily life but also in the sacred and ceremonial spheres.

In conclusion, horses in Hittite society were multifaceted assets that transcended their utilitarian function, serving as economic commodities, military resources, political instruments, and sacred entities. The Hittites' advanced equestrian practices, legal frameworks, and symbolic representations of horses collectively illustrate the profound significance of these animals in shaping the sociopolitical and religious landscape of the empire.

## DISCLOSURE OF AI USAGE

During the preparation of this manuscript the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for the following purposes: assistance with the English translation of the manuscript and correction of grammatical errors. The author reviewed, selected, and edited all generated content and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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