

IN MEMORIAM

Hans Gustav Güterbock

27 May 1908 – 29 March 2000

“My god, since my mother gave birth to me you have raised me ... It was you who associated me with good men. It was you who directed my deeds in a position of power ... Even as I matured, I gave proof of all the grace and wisdom of you, my god” (from the Hittite prayer of Kantuzzili)

Hans G. Güterbock was born in Berlin in 1908. His father was secretary of the Deutsche Orientgesellschaft, and the ancient Near East was a living presence in the household as he was growing up (see the autobiographical remarks in his retrospective article in Volume 4 of *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, edited by Jack Sasson). It does not therefore seem far-fetched to suppose in the spirit of the Hittite prayer that Hans Güterbock was destined from birth to achieve singular accomplishments in this realm of scholarship.

Having completed his secondary education, he studied Hittite for one year in Berlin with Hans Ehelolf, then went on to complete his university studies in Assyriology and Hittitology in Leipzig with Benno Landsberger and Johannes Friedrich. He defended his doctoral dissertation in 1933, soon after Hitler’s take-over of the government in Germany. Nazi policy barred him from any chance at serving as Ehelolf’s assistant in the Berlin Museum (there was Jewish heritage on his father’s side). He was able to obtain (for three years) the position of epigrapher on the German expedition in Boğazköy, conditional on private funding. Soon even this arrangement became impossible, and in 1936 he joined a number of expatriate German scholars on the faculty of the newly established Faculty of Languages, History, and Geography at Ankara (from 1946 part of Ankara University), where he served until 1948. Following a one-year guest lectureship at the University of Uppsala, Hans Güterbock came to the University of Chicago in 1949, rising to Professor in 1956. In 1969 he was named Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor of Hittitology, a position he held until his formal retirement in 1976. He remained a vitally active scholar in his retirement and indeed, as many colleagues at the Oriental Institute and elsewhere can attest, to the very last days of his life.

Hans Güterbock was trained by the very first generation of scholars who occupied themselves with the newly discovered Hittite language. Anyone who doubts that he deserves to be called a “pioneer” may read his account of life at Boğazköy when he first lived and worked there in the early thirties (see the retrospective alluded to above). Hittite was then relatively untrodden territory – what the Hittites would have called *dammili pēdan* “virgin ground.” Hans Güterbock made full use of the opportunity to take part in developing and shaping a new academic discipline, something he continued to do for the rest of the twentieth century.

Beginning in 1930 and continuing for four decades, he played a leading role in the vital task of publishing autograph copies of the Hittite cuneiform texts, the medium that makes accessible to most of us the primary data for the Hittite language and all the information that the texts contain about Hittite civilization. His dissertation, published in two parts in the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* in 1934 and 1938, served as the foundation for what may fairly be termed a subdiscipline of its own: historiography in the Hittite and Babylonian traditions and more widely in the

IN MEMORIAM

ancient world. As a look at current bibliographies will easily confirm, this topic — the rise of the very notion of “history” — remains a hotly debated issue at the start of a new century, and not just among scholars of the ancient Near East. His critical edition of the “Deeds of Suppiluliuma as Told by His Son, Mursili II,” which appeared in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* in 1956, remains definitive after forty years (despite the inevitable need for supplements to deal with newly discovered manuscripts).

The arrival in Boğazköy in 1936 of two other epigraphers who could deal with the Hittite cuneiform texts, and the discovery of large numbers of clay bullae in the Hittite capital, led Hans Güterbock to pursue a quite different avenue of research: the personal seals inscribed with “Hittite” hieroglyphs. His two-volume work on this topic, published in 1940 and 1942 (through the offices of Ernst Weidner), may again be characterized as seminal. He continued to make important contributions to the elucidation of the hieroglyphs, a script of native Anatolian invention, throughout his career. In fact, his penultimate article in 1998 dealt with the proper readings of certain hieroglyphic signs and their consequences.

In 1946 he published both Turkish and German editions of the Hittite version of the Hurrian myths of Kumarbi, followed in 1951–52 by his critical edition of the Song of Ullikummi, the Hittite rendering of a related Hurrian myth. Since until very recently our understanding of the Hurrian language itself was severely limited, these efforts were crucial in bringing to light for the modern world Near Eastern analogues to mythological themes appearing in classical Greek sources. The question of the timing, degree, and direction of cultural contacts between Bronze Age Greece and the ancient Near East has not since gone away, and in recent years the topic has regained prominence. Hans Güterbock played a lively role in the debate, including the much-vexed “Aḫḫiyawa question.”

I quoted at the beginning of this memorial the words of the Hittite Prayer of Kantuzzili. This prayer is part of a series of Hittite prayers whose complex compositional history was elucidated by Hans Güterbock himself in a famous 1958 article. We also have from his pen many articles on various aspects of Hittite deities and religious practices.

As should by now be clear, there is no aspect of our understanding of Hittite civilization to which he did not materially contribute. I cannot refrain, however, from closing this survey with some remarks on his last monograph, a critical edition of *The Hittite Instruction for the Royal Bodyguard (IBoT 1.36)*, published in collaboration with Theo van den Hout, who would one day succeed to his position at the Oriental Institute, in 1991. This work beautifully illustrates many of his outstanding strengths as a scholar. As one learns from the preface, the published version represents the results of a lifetime of study (beginning with his own autograph of the text in 1934!). The analyses incorporate insights not only of Hans Güterbock himself, but also of a veritable “who’s who” of Hittitology, gleaned from seminars and discussions held over a half-century. My highest praise is reserved for the sovereign translation (N.B. not into the author’s Muttersprache!). As I noted in my published review of the book, this is decidedly not the usual evasively literal “translationese” of scholarly editions. One may (rarely) disagree with the translation, but there is no doubt about what the author is claiming the text means, and more importantly this is clear to the general reader who does not know Hittite. This trait is characteristic of Hans Güterbock’s translations in general, but the unusual difficulties presented by this text increase one’s admiration for the accomplishment.

With the arrival of Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. at the University of Chicago in 1974, Hans Güterbock entered into a long and fruitful collaboration on his most ambitious scholarly undertaking: a comprehensive dictionary of the Hittite language, modeled after the nonpareil *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*. It is neither necessary nor proper for me to expound to readers of this report on the details of the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary* project. Those readers outside the Oriental

Institute may learn the essentials from the preface to *Volume L–N* (1980), pp. xiii–xviii. As someone who has undertaken lexical projects on a decidedly more modest scale, I can fully appreciate the incredible effort needed to master the overwhelming amount of detail while making the important facts accessible to readers in a succinct and accurate form. I will not repeat here the praise from my published reviews (*JAOS* 116 and 117). It is sufficient to say that *The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* is the crowning achievement to the career of Hans Güterbock, and it was good to learn from Harry Hoffner that he was able to assure Hans on the very day of his death that the dictionary's future is solid in terms of both financial support and editorial expertise.

Since I did not have the privilege to work closely with Hans Güterbock as an immediate colleague, I have focused my remarks on the significance of his published work. However, I will close by briefly repeating here the incident I recalled for the congratulatory volume for his ninetyth birthday celebration. When I completed my dissertation on Hittite in 1977, I sent, with youthful audacity, unsolicited copies to four leading senior Hittitologists. From the other three I received very cordial and positive — but understandably brief — replies. Hans sent me a letter of *seven* single-spaced pages — a very positive general evaluation followed by detailed page-by-page comments. He concluded by apologizing that he really could not spend more time at the moment and must break off. Needless to say, nothing could have been more encouraging to a beginner than such close respectful scrutiny from one of the leading Hittitologists in the world! The lasting legacy of Hans Güterbock lies not only in his trail blazing scholarship, but also in his personal influence on his students and all those whose careers he nurtured.

H. Craig Melchert

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
