

Pax Hethitica

Studies on the Hittites and their Neighbours in Honour of Itamar Singer

Bearbeitet von
Yoram Cohen, Amir Gilan, Jared L Miller

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Introduction

Itamar Singer was born on the 26th of November 1946 in Dej, Rumania. His parents, both Holocaust survivors, met in Rumania after the War. His mother Gertrude came from a German-speaking family from Tchernovitz, Bukowina, his father Zoltán from a Hungarian-speaking family from Dej, Transylvania. Itamar's upbringing in this multilingual Austro-Hungarian milieu (studying in a Rumanian school but speaking Hungarian at home) surely played a role in his knack for acquiring new languages, both ancient and modern. His penchant for history he inherited from his father, who had written a scholarly work on the history of the Jewish community of Dej and its district. When Itamar was five the family moved to Cluj/Kolozsvár, the capital of Transylvania. His father, a community leader, was repeatedly imprisoned by the communist regime for his Zionist activities, until emigration visas, after years of denial, were finally granted in 1958.

The family then embarked on their exodus to Israel with a train journey from Bucharest to Napoli. While awaiting a ship to take them to their new home, Itamar's mother took him to see the ruins of Pompeii, a visit which left an indelible impression upon him. Upon their arrival in Israel, the family settled down in Holon, a city recently founded upon sand dunes not far from Tel Aviv in order to accommodate the influx of immigrants. There Itamar attended primary and secondary school, and this is where he has made his home ever since. During one summer vacation from high school Itamar participated as a volunteer in the Arad excavations conducted by Yohanan Aharoni, his first exciting experience in field archaeology.

From 1965 to 1968 Itamar studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, obtaining his B.A. in the departments of Archaeology and Geography. During these and the following years he participated in excavations at Megiddo, Beersheva, Tel Malhata, Tel Masos and Hanita. From 1969 to 1973 he fulfilled his military duty as an officer in the Air Force, serving as an aerial-photograph interpreter. Simultaneously, he completed his M.A. studies at Tel Aviv University in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures. His M.A. thesis 'Geographical Aspects of the Proto-Hattian Problem' (1973), written under the supervision of Aharon Kempinski, anticipated his future research into the ties between history, geography and theology.

From 1973 to 1975 Itamar continued his Hittite studies with Heinrich Otten in Marburg, supported by a Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst stipend. His initial goal was to conduct a historical and geographical study of the distribution system of the Hittite 'cult administrators' (AGRIG). However, it soon became evident that such an endeavour required an in-depth study of the 'Gate-house (KI.LAM) Festival', which contains most of the relevant passages. His resulting dissertation, 'The KI.LAM Festival', completed in 1978, was published in the same series in which the present volume has appeared, *Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten* (1983–1984). It was the first complete edition of a major Hittite festival, and it quickly became a highly influential study of Hittite religion.

Upon returning to Israel, Itamar joined the staff of the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures, where he became a full professor in 1996 and where he continued teaching until his early retirement in 2006. Between 1984 and 1995 he also taught in the Department of Jewish History, and periodically also at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Bar Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, Haifa University and Ben-Gurion University in Beersheva. Teaching concurrently at several university departments and other educational institutions enabled him to pursue parallel research paths, Hittitology, in the broadest sense of the word, on the one hand and the history and cultures of Canaan and the Sea Peoples on the other.

Itamar's primary interests in the historical domain lay in the international affairs of the 13th century BC, the Golden Age of what he has termed the *pax hethitica*. Many of his studies dealt with the diplomatic relations between Hatti and the other great powers as well as with the Hittite domination of Syria, and especially the kingdoms of Amurru and Ugarit. At the same time, his continued interest in Anatolian religions led to an edition and in-depth study of Muwatalli's Prayer (1996). His ground-breaking conclusion concerning the theological reasons for Muwatalli's transfer of the Hittite capital from Hattusa to Tarhuntassa induced further investigations of the political schism in the Hittite Empire, which played a major role in its decline and final disintegration. His interest in the prayer genre culminated in his English translations of the best-preserved Hittite Prayers in the *Writings from the Ancient World* series (2002).

His latest book to date, *Ha-hittim ve tarbutam* (The Hittites and their Culture; Jerusalem 2009), is the first full-length treatment of Hittite history and culture to appear in Hebrew. Its publication was the realization of a long-standing desire to present Hebrew readers with a more accessible route to a distant culture from long ago, one that nonetheless maintains much relevance for those interested in the history of Israel and the whole region in antiquity.

During his long tenure at Tel Aviv Itamar carried almost single-handedly the banner of Hittite studies in Israel, and his classes and seminars on Hittite language and culture were regularly attended by students from numerous universities. Though specializing in Hittite studies, he insisted on offering students the broadest possible initiation into the study of the Ancient Near East, assuring that their curriculum included courses on the history of writing and on ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean religions and mythologies. In so doing he was able to convey his conviction that the archaeology and history of the Ancient Near East, and with it that of ancient Israel, should be contextualized and appreciated along the widest possible spectrum. Itamar's commitment to his research and teaching was certainly contagious, and despite the relative obscurity and humble resources of the field, he supervised over the years a large number of MA and PhD theses. His belief in and personal concern for his students led him to involve many graduate and undergraduate students in his research projects.

Itamar travelled and contributed to many conferences and lectured during sabbatical leaves at various academic institutions in Germany, England, Italy, France, Turkey, the United States, Japan, Australia and Argentina. During one of these trips he met Graciela Noemi Gestoso, an Argentine Egyptologist, who he later married. They now live in Holon, together with their dog Shuppi and countless cats. Alongside his academic duties and interests, Itamar has been involved in various philanthropic and political activities, notably the Israeli Peace Movement.

In 2008 Itamar was forced into retirement by poor health. He very reluctantly gave up teaching and active supervision of students after more than 30 years at Tel Aviv University. Nonetheless, in recent years he has carried on with his research and, as his bibliography provided in this volume testifies, his output continues to grow with each passing year.

It is upon the occasion of Itamar's retirement that we present him with this honorary volume—a collection of studies from his long-standing friends and colleagues, some of which are former students. It is presented as a tribute to and in appreciation of his scholarly achievements as well as a sign of gratitude to a dedicated teacher and mentor. We hope that this volume will find his favour and reflect his interests and broad intellectual predilections. Collected in these pages are studies concerned with Hittite history and historiography—from the earliest formative periods of the Hittite Kingdom, through its apogee and fall to the survival of the Hittite dynasties of the Iron Age as well as the history and archaeology of the Sea Peoples and Philistines—touching on Hittite mythology, prayers, rituals, religious personnel and magic. All these topics have been a focus of Itamar's attention, and over the years, as one can see in his publications, he has returned to them again and again.

The name of this honorary volume, *Pax Hethitica*, acknowledges Itamar's significant contributions to the study of the long era of Hittite diplomacy and supremacy in the Ancient Near East in the 13th century. It also echoes his belief in and steadfast commitment to the investigation of what one might call the international spirit of the period. The receptiveness of Hittite society, especially in this age, with regard to the political ideologies and religious customs of neighbouring cultures, as well as the influence of Hittite culture on the surrounding areas, are key themes which permeate Itamar's scholarly output, be it in detailed studies or general overviews.

There are not many occasions upon which students are able to repay a former mentor for the time, attention and concern he has devoted to them over the years, not only during their studies but also long after having graduated and embarked on their professional careers. We, the editors, have therefore seen the task of organizing and editing this volume as a labour of love dedicated to our teacher, a man of integrity, honesty and loyalty. We extend Itamar our wishes for many fruitful years to come and eagerly await further publications.

In our efforts to complete the volume in a timely fashion, we have benefitted from the support of the following persons, who deserve our appreciation and acknowledgements. We are indebted to Gernot Wilhelm for his assistance throughout the process of editing the volume and for accepting the manuscript for publication in the prestigious series *Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten*, published by Harrassowitz Verlag. He felt, as we did, that it would be a fitting tribute to Itamar to have this volume published in the same venue in which his dissertation appeared almost 30 years ago. We also wish to thank Sivan Kedar and Shirley Bell for their assistance in compiling the bibliographies and the list of abbreviations, as well as Ofer Sheinberg for formatting the volume and providing us with a camera-ready manuscript. We are also grateful to Guido Kryszat and especially to Erika Fischer for their careful editing of the German manuscripts. Sincere thanks are due also to Reinhard Friedrich and Andrea Stolz of Harrassowitz Verlag, who oversaw the printing of the volume.

Yoram Cohen
Amir Gilan
Jared Miller

Tel Aviv and Munich, December 2009

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