

The “Protocols” for the Hittite “Royal Guard” during the Old Kingdom: Observations on Elite Military Units and their Possible Warfare Applications

By Eduardo Ferreira *

In this article, we intend to analyse the importance and modus operandi of a military unit (generally known as “Royal Guard”) whose function was, among other things, the protection of the Hattuša-based Hittite kings. For this essay, we will be mainly using two Hittite textual sources known as “instructions” or “protocols”. We aim to find a connection between these guards and their function regarding the protection of the royal palace as well as their military enlistment in that elite unit. The period to be covered in this analysis comes directly from the choice of sources: the Hittite Old Kingdom, confined between the chronological beacons of the 17th, 16th and 15th centuries BC. With this analysis, we intend to provide some relevant data that may contribute to a better understanding of these elite military units, particularly in regards to their probable warfare functions. Were they used in battle? How were they armed? What was their tactical importance in combat? How was the recruitment done? How were the units formed? These will be some questions that we will try to answer throughout this article.

Keywords: *guard, palace, command, warfare, infantry*

Introduction

The Hittites were an Indo-European people that arrived in Anatolia through the Caucasus from Eurasia between 2000 and 1900 BC (Haywood 2005, Bryce 2005). On their Indo-European journey to the west, they also brought horses (Raulwing 2000, Renfrew 1990, Joseph and Fritz 2017/2018). The Hittite people earliest history in Anatolia began in the 18th century BC with the Kussar kings, followed by an obscure period which was interrupted by King Anitta’s unification process. This leader is a central character in one of the earliest written records from Anatolia, the so-called “Anitta Text”. This source narrates the conquest and expansion made by both Anitta and his father, Pithana, monarchs of Kussara and rulers of other regions in Central Anatolia.

Around 1650 BC, Hattušili I rose to power and made Hattuša the Hittite capital. He built his royal palace in the city and there he organised his administrative and military institutions. This monarch’s reign was marked by a centralisation of power and foreign expansion, with successive military campaigns in the north and central regions of Anatolia. After his death, he was succeeded by his adopted son, Muršili I (c. 1620-1590 BC), who continued his father’s enterprise. This king carried out campaigns in the northern regions of Syria, but

*Researcher, School of Arts and Humanities, Centre of History, University of Lisbon, Portugal.

failed to attach any Syrian territories, like the greater power in the region, Yamhad. Until c. 1440 BC, the Hittites underwent a complicated phase, during which they lost importance in the larger political scenario. This was due especially to some border pressures from Arzawa in the West, Kaska in the North, the Kizzuwatna population in the Southeast and the Mittani to the East (Van de Mieroop 2016, Carreira 1999, Liverani 2012, Bryce 2005).

The apogee of this empire occurred between c. 1344-1295 BC, during the reigns of Suppiluliuma I and Muršili II where they were a hegemonic power that dominated most regions of Anatolia, a part of Northern Mesopotamia (Mittani) and Northern Syria, including cities like Aleppo, Alalakh, Tell Ahmar, and Karkamiš, among others (Bryce 2007, Carreira 1999).

Both "Protocol for the Royal Body Guard" (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36, Miller 2013) and the "Protocol for the Palace Gatekeeper" (CTH 263.B/KUB 26.28, Miller 2013) are a succession of detailed practical procedures that military men had within the Hittite King's palace in Hattuša. These texts are rich textual sources regarding their descriptive scope, although the latter is rather fragmented. This factor explains why the "palace gatekeepers" text is less used throughout the study. Especially considering the textual examples used and that contributed to the development of the approached problem, coming almost exclusively from the "Protocol for the Royal Body Guard". Although this reality, these texts provide us with an insight into the procedures and the characteristics of the Hittite elite military units. Regarding the study made by Hans G. Güterbock and Theo van den Hout on the "Protocol for the Royal Guard", we can assume that the first sections report on how guards should proceed in the morning, from the moment they appear in the "royal guard yard", to the opening of the palace gates (Hoffner 1997), and the worshipping of the unnamed protector god (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1. 22-25, Miller 2013). After these events, we are given information about the king's safe departure and the procedures associated with such an event, as well as the monarch's inevitable return to the palace (Güterbock and Van den Hout 1991).

These military personnel would be highly trained and essential for the protection of all Hittite royal family members, with a special focus on the king and his children. Their discipline would be a key aspect in a proper performance of the required functions, a factor that is evident in the detail present in these soldiers' operating systems. Certainly, if a royal guard make any mistake, he should be severely punished because of his responsibility.

As the article title suggests, our focus will mainly be on the possible warfare duties that these elite units could have had. Therefore, the palace procedures that were associated with these units, based on this source, will only be briefly analysed. We should also mention that methodologically, it was used as the main translation of both Hittite sources, the work of Jared Miller, named *Royal Hittite Instructions and Related Administrative Texts* (Miller 2013) As a complement to Jared Miller's work, we will also consult and compare the translations of the "Protocol for the Royal Guard" made by Hans G. Güterbock and Theo van den Hout in their work, "The Hittite Instruction for the Royal Bodyguard" in the *Assyriological Studies 24* (Güterbock and Van den Hout 1991) and also with the translation of Gregory McMahon named "Instructions to the Royal Guard

(MEŠEDI Protocol)” in *Context of Scripture, Vol. 1, Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* edited by William Hallo e K. Younger, Jr (McMahon 1997).

Specifically, from the Hittite source “Protocol for the Royal Body Guard”, comparing the three text’s translations in question, we can observe the difficulties associated with this same script. According to Gregory McMahon, today in Istanbul this inscription is especially problematic as it has several textual overlaps that have been added over time. Beyond this temporal problem, the source is full of specific terms relating to the “royal guard” procedures that make the text even more complicated to translate. Take has an example a passage from this source, more specifically in column 3 on line 1 to 5:

“[...] The [bod]yguard who [brings] the petitioners [...], and he [takes his place] behind the gold-spear man. [Then as soon as] the king request the law case, the bodygua[r...] it and p[laces] it in the chief of the bodyguard’s hand. [...] law case, and he tells it to the chief of the bodyguard, but the chief of the bodyguard [...]. [...]” (Miller 2013).

“[...] [The gu]ard who [brings in] the defendants [takes his stand] behind the gold-spear-man. [When] the king asks for a case (to be tried), the guard [picks] it [out] and p[uts] it into the hand of the chief-of-guards and tells the chief-of-guards what] the case [is]; but the chief of guards [tells the king]. [...]” (Güterbock and Van den Hout 1991).

“[...] [The gu]ard who [brings in] the defendants [takes his place] behind the man of the golden spear. [But when] the king requests a case, the guard [picks] it [out] and p[laces] it in the hand of the chief of the guard. He tells the chief of the guard [what] the case (is), but the chief of the guard [tells the king]. [...]” (McMahon 1997).

In the order presented first the translation of Miller, then the Güterbock in conjunction with Van den Hout and finally McMahon’s version. From these three examples we can see two groups, the first consisting only of Miller’s translation and the second the remaining two researchers. The first is more reliable to the original Hittite text, because it does not intend to add to the source gaps possible translations. We can see, firstly in the case of Güterbock and Van den Hout and then in the adaptation of McMahon, which even refers that as a basis for its translation, he used the work of these authors. Aspect evident due to the similarity of the translations, with only a few concrete terms to differ. These clear differences in translation effectively demonstrate the difficulties inherent to this source.

Regarding source citations throughout the article, the differences between Miller and Güterbock and Van den Hout/McMahon’s translations are evident, always in the terminological and textual gap-filling aspects. It should be noted that both translations have their value and neither appears to be incorrect. As already mentioned, for the specific case of this article we chose to use the translation of Jared Miller, because of his approach to the text on such a specific theme, it seemed safer to use a translation that did not try to address the shortcomings of the own text. This will avoid possible misleading conclusions.

The King’s Safeguard: The “Royal Guard” Composition and their Command System

There is a close relationship between the “Royal Guard”, the “guardian of the palace gate”, and the “men with golden spears” referred to in several passages of both protocols, as we can observe in the following sentence from the “Protocol for the Royal Body Guard”: “[...] they do not lift the door bolt of the gate. And the [bodygua]rds, the gatekeepers (and) the forecourt-cleaners come out [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1.8, Miller 2013). This example suggests a strong organisational interconnection between space and labour. In fact, if we take look at the word itself, “Royal Guard” is a translation of the transliteration of a following term (of Akkadogram): MEŠEDI. The word MEŠEDI is thought to come from the old assyrian term MIŠITTU which means “depot” or “store”. If we accept this idea created by Landsberger, then MEŠEDI-men meant those who originally guarded the treasury. Other theories suggest that the term comes from another old assyrian word, MAGAZINRAUM that would attribute to these individuals the function of “storeroom officials”. Von Soden also connects the word MEŠEDI with the term MEŠĒDI that arises in Mari and would be related to door functions, probably with the guarding of entrances (Beal 1986).

The sources narratives show us that each military and civil personnel had their plans and rules, and all must have been of extreme importance to guarantee the security of the Hittite king. This scenario is present in the following excerpt:

“[...] they do [...] they do [...]. The bodyguards, [tho]ugh, [...] [u]p/ [for]th, and they [...] before the gatekeepers (and) the forecourt-cleaners. [Then] they go in, and they stand at the gate of the courtyard. Their [e]yes are tu[r]ned forwards, so that they cover one courtyard of the pa[la]ce, and [th]ey [keep] watch. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1.1-6, Miller 2013).

There are several examples throughout the Hittite texts that describe the procedures of these units. The concern regarding observation and being in a constant state of vigilance is a recurring theme. There are some examples in which some soldiers had to leave their positions and go to the toilet, for example. According to the source, a soldier had to inform the guard next to him, who would, in turn, inform his nearest guard, until finally the message arrived to a third-degree officer, who in turn informed the military of second degree. The line of communication then ends with the “commander of the 10 of the bodyguard” or the “chief of the bodyguard”. They would then decide the verdict regarding the need of the guard (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1.33-38; Miller 2013). Naturally, this was essential for the proper functioning of the palace security procedures. Focusing only on the “Royal Guard”, it should be noted that this unit was not always located inside the palace, as the following excerpt proves:

“[...] Then the bodyguards take (their) place in the courtyard of the bodyguard; and 12 bodyguards stand by the inside wall in the direction of the palace, and they hold spears. If, however, 12 bodyguards are not available – either someone has been sent on a journey or someone is at home on leave – and there are too many spears, then

they carry away the spears that are left, and they place them with the gatekeepers. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1.9-15, Miller 2013).

Naturally, the monarch must have always been surrounded by these guards, and the reference to the “journey” suggests that the lack of guards in the palace was a consequence of the king’s departure. This movement could mainly have two dimensions: one diplomatic and the other military. The latter, more important for this analysis, may strengthen the possibility of these units accompanying the king into a battle context. On the other hand, it is clear that, if this was the case, the king did not carry the whole contingent. An understandable fact because the palace also needed to be protected.

What amount of information can the “Protocol for the Royal Body Guard” offer us regarding the making of this the unit? We find reference to two types of spear men: the regular ones and those with a “golden spear”. What were the differences between them? See the following example:

“[...] Gold-spear men, though, stand by the wall in the direction of the gate; [...], one bodyguard stands to one side near the gate in the direction of the wall of the bodyguard, whereas one gold-spear man stands to the (other) side near the gate in the direction of the wall of the gold-spear men, and they keep watch by day. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1.16-19, Miller 2013).

In this small passage, we can observe the distinction between the guards who used the “golden spear” and those who didn’t, the latter being referred to by the generic term “guard”. The source does not provide us with precise clues as to whether these military men were above the rest or if they were, in terms of rank, equal to the others. Were they a separate division within the Hittite “Royal Guard” itself? Were they better trained and armed? The number of references to these military personnel throughout the “protocol” indicates that they were, in fact, a part of the “Royal Guard” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36, Bryce 2007). However, the use of the term “golden” seems to give these troops a higher status, even though in the texts there are no quotes that could suggest any superiority of rank. In fact, Richard Beal assumes that the MEŠEDI were more prestigious than the “Gold-spear men” (Beal 1986). Perhaps the only exception is the following expression: “[...] A gold-spear man [takes his place bet]ween them, [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 2.10, Miller 2013). This example may not say much but it allows us to suggest that the presence of this soldier between two guards is an indication of “leadership” in relation to his peers. In fact, in another context described in the source, in a military parade the soldiers with “golden spears” come before the regular guards (Miller 2013). Admitting that these “men with the golden spears” were superior in ability and status to the others, it is plausible to note that these could be the military closest to the Hittite monarch. Issues related to these units are still poorly understood, raising some questions that need to remain open. It is also known from the source “Proclamation of Telepinu”, also known as “Telepinu, Constitutional Edict” that these units would be used for other purposes, since the text states that Zuru (“chief of the personal bodyguard”) sent his son, Tahurwaili, a “man with the

golden spear” to assassinate Tittiya and his family (CTH 19. KBo 12.7: 2.II.1-7, Van den Hout 2003, Carreira 1999, Mōttus 2018, Beckman 1986).

“[...] The gold-spear man who stood next to them, though, takes his place; the palace servant of the spear, however, gives the whip to the chief of the palace servants, the chief of the palace servants, in turn, gives it to the king. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 2. 20-23, Miller 2013).

In this excerpt, we can find another term that could be related to the “Royal Guard”: the “palace servant of the spear”. Given the terminology and the reference to their weaponry, it is possible that these were soldiers, like the others, with the role of protecting the palace. They probably had the lowest rank within the chain of command of the “Royal Guard”, and would be headed by the “chief of the palace servants”. It is debatable whether this position would be exclusively of a military nature, since it is necessary to take into account the other workers who were also considered servants, like the cooks for example. It should also be mentioned the “chief of the palace staff”. Among the various officials referred to in the “Protocol for the Gatekeepers”, we must highlight the following: the “wine-cup bearer”, the “table server”, the “chef”, the “entertainer”, the “cult singer”, the “priest of the god Zilipuri”, the “tent man”, the “scepter-bearer”, the “tailor”, the “runner”, the “sentry-runner” and the “duddushiyalla-[...]” (CTH 263.B/KUB 26.28: 1-36, Miller 2013).

As far as we can tell, there were two high hierarchical positions in the “Royal Guard” command system: the “Chief of the Royal Guard” and the “Commander of 10 of the Bodyguard” (Miller 2013). What were their functions? What were the differences between them?

“[...] And when the chief of the Bodyguard and the commander of 10 of the bodyguard come up, since the chief of the bodyguard holds a staff, as soon as he prostrates himself to the tutelary deity of the spear, then whatever bodyguard of rank (is there) takes the staff from him, and he places it behind the altar. The staff that the commander of 10 of the bodyguard holds however, he hands it [over] to a bodyguard, and the bodyguard holds it for h[im]. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1: 22-26, Miller 2013).

“[...] Then the chief of the Bodyguard goes, and two lor[ds walk] behind him; be it the commander of charioteers or a commander of 10, they stand [behind] the chief of the bodyguard. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 3. 6-8, Miller 2013).

Taken from the “Protocol for the Royal Bodyguard”, the above excerpts show us that, in the first case, there does not seem to be a clear hierarchical disparity, while in the second case, the “Commander of 10” could suggest that this military position was perhaps more related to the regular army officer rather than the “Royal Guard” itself (due to the lack of reference to this specific unit). This military official emerges behind the “chief of the bodyguard”, a procedure that could indicate a hierarchically inferior position. Can the same apply to the “Commander of 10 of the Bodyguard”? We can assume that the “Chief of the Bodyguard” was hierarchically superior to the “Commander of 10 of the

Bodyguard” (Miller 2013), because the former had a more generalist title and could cover a whole contingent, whereas the latter would command only a unit of ten soldiers. Thus, there must have been a need for more officers with this title, all of whom were to be commanded by the “Chief of the Bodyguard”. The functions of each of these officials cannot be stated with certainty. The present nomenclature refers to differences regarding their practical functions. The “Chief” would have administrative functions, as well as being responsible for the organisation of the site where these military operations would occur (Bryce 2007). The “Commander” would have functions pertaining more to the warlike spectrum, and certainly in battle. It is necessary to reinforce the idea that these are approaches to a problematic matter, since there is no data which allows for the confirmation of the possible answers to the above questions. About the units themselves, Richard Beal suggests the following hierarchical order: MEŠEDI, “Gold-spear men”, “Heavy-spear men”, “Bronze-spear men” and “spearmen” (Beal 1986).

“[...] Then a palace servant goes up to the roof, but before him [a deaf man] leads. Then the deaf man pulls the window shut, and the [palace] servant [...]” (CTH 263.B/KUB 26.28: 2. 13-14, Miller 2013).

“[...] If a Bodyguard does run off, though, and he carries a spear down out of the post, and the gatekeepers catch him in (his) delinquency, then he “unfastens his shoe.” If, however, the bodyguard tricks the gatekeeper, and he carries down a spear, but the gatekeeper does not see him, then the bodyguard will catch the gatekeeper in (his) delinquency. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 1. 53-56, Miller 2013).

In both texts, we can detect other functions, like those of the “gatekeeper”, which according to certain passages of the “protocol” had some preponderance, including over some members of the “Royal Guard”.

The “Royal Guard” Outside the Palace: An Elite Unit in Battle?

Although with almost three decades old, we should mention Richard Beal's PhD dissertation, where he addresses, among various aspects of the Hittite military machine, the Hittite kings' “royal bodyguard”. The author states in his conclusion that there is no indication that these military units escorted the Hittite king into the warfare like contexts (“[...] there is no evidence as to whether or not they also accompanied him on campaign and into battle. [...]”) (Beal 1986). With the exception of the existence of another elite unit that we do not know, it seems difficult to consider that these “guards” would not accompany the king to the situations where he would be most endangered. Richard Beal, between pages 272 and 274 states in great detail that these MEŠEDI units accompanied the monarch on his travels, including standard procedures to better ensure his safety. From the outset, Richard Beal's view seems debatable. Even the author in question mentions that some of these military men could come from the regular soldiers' units of the Hittite army (“[...] may well have been regular army troops detached for this purpose. [...]”) (Beal 1986). For example, let us take the case of the battle

of Kadeš, where pharaoh Ramses II was accompanied by his personal guard, the Shardans. Military unit which, according to the descriptions in the written and iconographic sources, was essential for the safety of the king during the Hittite charge against the Egyptian military camp (Spalinger 2005).

Naturally, most of the responsibilities of the “Royal Guard” concerned the monarch's own residence. In which other contexts could these units be used? We can highlight two situations (Bryce 2007): when the king was moving to other places during battle and when the king, or some member of the royal family, was present. In this article, based on the analysis of the “Protocol for the Royal Bodyguard” source, we will focus only on the second context. We will try to identify the elements that can provide us with clues about which way could these elite military units behave in battle. As previously shown, the Hittite “Royal Guard” had as known officers the “Chief of the Bodyguard” and the “Commander of 10 of the Bodyguard”. According to Trevor Bryce, the “Chief of the Bodyguard” would be a position of extreme importance and prestige within the Hittite military machine. In addition, the attribution of this position falls often on members of the royal family, usually the brothers of the king, as well as the heir son (Bryce 2011, Lorenz and Schrakamp 2011). The following excerpt proves the relationship between the royal house and this type of officer: “[...], wrote this tablet in the city of Tawa in the presence of the prince Nerikkaili; Huzziya, chief of the royal bodyguard; Prince Kurakura, [...]” (CTH 169/KUB 3.70: 2.30-43, Beckman 1999). While the former appears to be a very specific post and clearly associated only with these units, the latter has equivalents in the Hittite regular army command system, usually only referred to as the “Commander of 10” (Güterbock and Van den Hout 1991). Regarding the main function of these units, it is safe to say that the “Royal Guard” was present in battle when the king himself was as well. However, it is unlikely that the monarch would participate in the actual melee (Burney 2004, Lorenz and Schrakamp 2011), because this would put him in a position of direct danger, a completely undesirable situation (Bryce 2007). Did these units only join combat when the king was in danger? In a situation where the Hittite army was at a disadvantage or to be defeated, this enabled the enemy to approach the rear of the army formation, the most probable position for the king. On the other hand, the aforementioned difference between the “regular royal guard” and soldiers with “golden spears” may attribute some value to the possible use of the former section in combat, even when there was no threat to the king. It is now important to observe the characteristics of the soldiers who were part of these units. See the following excerpt:

“[...] Two heavy-spear men, though, ta[ke] their places opposite the king to the right; they do not hold [s]pears. A gold-spear man [takes his place bet]ween them, and he holds a gold-plated [spe]ar. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 2. 9-11, Miller 2013).

The reference to the “heavy-spear men” leads us to think of a categorisation roughly similar to a heavy infantry typology. A reality otherwise predictable, given the main function of these units. Were these soldiers on foot or riding chariots? Knowing the importance of this weapon in Hittite warfare (Bryce 2007) and associating this factor to the potential that the war chariot achieved during the

Second Millennium BC (Lorenz and Schrakamp 2011), it is plausible to suggest a relationship between the “Royal Guard” and these mobile units. Still, there are many questions regarding the various aspects of the typologies and the way of combat with the Hittite chariots. This is mainly due to the lack of precise data, both textual and iconographic (Archer 2010, Lorenz and Schrakamp 2010, Noble 2015). Since this is not the subject of this article, we will just point out that, as Mary Littauer and Joost Crouwel have shown, using the spear while on a chariot as a shock weapon would be very problematic (Littauer and Crouwel 2002a). Therefore, given the presence of spears in these military units, it seems plausible to admit that these would be infantry forces. Would this imply that the monarch himself was not on a chariot when in battle? This question leads us to the political side of the war chariot, so often marked in other Bronze Age contexts, like Egypt or Assyria (the latter in an imminently posterior chronology), where the monarch was often depicted on his war chariot (Quesada Sanz 2005, Hamblin 2006). In Hatti, the connection between royalty and this weapon is not as plentiful as in the above-mentioned contexts, although references exist which prove that the king would use vehicles for his movements in battle. In iconographic terms there are only the representations in Egyptian murals about the battle of Kadeš (Collins 2007), as well as an image coming from Zinjirli where two soldiers are observed on a war chariot (Lorenz and Schrakamp 2011). Unfortunately, it is not clear that one of these troops can be considered, iconographically speaking, a king. See the following excerpt:

“[...] Then, when the king requests the chariot, guard brings the step-stool and sets it (up), and the king takes the chariot. And the bodyguard who is the farrier holds a staff, and he grasps the horse on the right by the bit with the right hand, while with the left he holds the stave; [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 3. 55-58, Miller 2013).

It is known to us that in other contexts, like the Mittani, the king’s personal guard was composed by soldiers riding chariots, about ten vehicles to be more precise (Gabriel 2002). The exception was the presence of guards with “veterinary” knowledge (Miller 2013) which, of course, had the task of treating the horses that pulled the war chariots, including those from the monarch’s vehicle. There are sources that help us prove that the Hittite king usually moved in a chariot, and probably in military contexts that would be the same case. See the following example: “[...] If, however, he (the king) goes into some place by chariot, then as soon as the king step[s] down from the chariot [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 4.23, Miller 2013). Referring to the Hittite sources only, there is no other evidence regarding the use of chariots by the “Royal Guard”, nor any part of that unit, to protect the king. Although, if the Hittite monarch was, during battle, on a vehicle (Bryce 2007) it would be necessary for these same guards to be on some kind of mobile platform as well. Other data that seems to link the “Royal Guard” to some war chariot units are the archaeological data discovered in Pi-Ramesse (Egypt) inside a workshop. According to E. B. Pusch, the armament discovered revealed a strong relation between the Hittite chariot formations and the units that would have accompanied Princess Maathorneferure. She was the daughter of Hattušili II, who married Ramses II in the thirty-fourth year of his

reign (Lorenz and Schrakamp 2011, Genz 2011). Taking into account the current knowledge, together with the absence of information concerning the actual Hittite war chariot units, especially when we compared it to other places like the Mittani and the Neo-Assyria (Dezsó 2006), the “Royal Guard” of the Hittite king was likely to be a well-trained, mixed military force, mostly made up by heavy infantry forces and war chariot units. In fact, the term *māru damqu ša qurub* is usually translated into “soldier of the guard with war chariots”, a suggestive designation that connects these soldiers to the “Royal Guard” units that used vehicles (GIŠ.GIGIR *qurubte*) (Dezsó 2012).

How were these soldiers recruited? What was their origin? Information about the Hittite army recruitment process is sparse and the same is true of the “Royal Guard”. According to Trevor Bryce, most contingents would be formed by volunteers seeking a military career. There would also be foreign soldiers and others from the recruitment process itself. This was done locally, with each region or village having to provide a certain number of troops to the army (Bryce 2002). Later, the recruits would be sent to barracks, the biggest and most important ones being located in Hattuša. Although it seems that there was already a pre-selection of the most capable soldiers in their home regions (Bryce 2007), we can assume that the selection of the soldiers that would form the contingent of the “Royal Guard” would take place in the barracks. Here, surely, the most capable would be chosen to serve the king and assure his family’s protection.

How many troops were part of the Hittite “Royal Guard” during the Old Kingdom? As we previously observed, this type of soldier was commanded by the “Commander of 10”, a designation which immediately refers to a military organization based on the number ten and its multiples, like we also find in Mittani (Gabriel 2002), Egypt (Schulman 1963, Ferreira and Varandas 2016) and Assyria (De Backer 2014). Although the base number of soldiers in these units is clear, their total number is unknown. Was it forty? Fifty? Sixty? Due to the lack of additional information, it is impossible to refer to a specific number, although a possible quantification between forty and sixty can be a reasonable probability in this context and can be extended up to one hundred (Beal 1986). Specially during the 16th century BC, the Hittite armies would have about forty vehicles in their ranks. Therefore, given the cost of this weapon, it is plausible to admit that the personal guardianship of the Hittite kings during the Old Kingdom could be slightly higher (Noble 2015). This theory can be amplified with the Jürgen Lorenz and Ingo Schrakamp’s theory about the presence of regular soldiers in the composition of the guard units, often referred to as “spear-men” (Lorenz and Schrakamp 2011). Assuming that this idea is correct, we may suggest an application of this section of the “Royal Guard” in direct combat during a battle, even away from the king himself. Just like in the occasions where the king was not leading the troops into battle, he often assigned nominal command of the army to a member of the royal family, one of his brothers for example (Bryce 2002). Knowing that usually the title of “Chief of the Royal Bodyguard” was given to someone inside the royal family, it is probable that in some situations the same member could have both functions inside the Hittite army (Bryce 2007). This fact creates a close relationship between the combat made by the regular soldiers and

the elite units. Therefore, this could mean that the “Royal Guard” officers must have had some skills within the tactical command of the contingents in battle. In the following excerpt, we can observe the reference to what appears to be a tactical movement:

“[...] But if the king calls some foreign troops, either hostile Kaskean troops, or Kammahean troops or whatever troops, then all the bodyguards walk behind. But i[f] there are too few spears for them, then they take spe[ars] from the spear-men and they walk behind. That’s called “encircling”. [...]” (CTH 262/IBoT 1.36: 3.35-40, Miller 2013).

In this example, taken from the “Protocol for the Royal Bodyguard”, we notice what may be a procedure applicable in warlike context. “Encircling” can have two interpretations beyond the context in which the excerpt is inserted (in the palace), and both can be complementary in the sense that one does not exclude the other, since they could occur in different situations:

1. King’s protection.
2. In combat during a battle.

In the first case, the “Royal Guards” movements around the monarch were linear so that he would be in the centre, behind the “shield wall”, and protected. Taking into account the tactical limitations regarding this effort, this type of movement would only be possible if the king was on foot. If he was on a chariot, a movement like this would be of extreme difficulty, because his guards would need to be on vehicles as well. Also, the tactical positioning of these soldiers, in order to protect the monarch, would be problematic, since the vehicles had to be in constant motion in order to be effective. On the other hand, if the elite units were on foot and the king was on a chariot, the positioning would be possible but this would not effectively protect the monarch due to his elevation relative to the others, making the king a perfect target for enemy archers and slingers. The second context implies the use of these soldiers in combat, whether it would be the entire contingent or only part of it. Here, two other possibilities have to be taken into account, since these soldiers could be fighting either on foot or riding chariots. Both options are plausible when applied to the word “encircling”, since the term could be used in a close combat or in a distant fight situation – the Hittite chariots, at least from the Old Kingdom, were used as a platform for archers. A circumstance supported by some iconographic sources and because of this reality, many researchers refute the possibility of the Hittite chariots being used as a melee weapon, arguing that it was instead used as a shooting platform with the bow and arrow as the primary weapon (Bryce 2007, Lorenz and Schrakamp 2011, Littauer and Crouwel 2002b, Burney 2004).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that in their basis the Hittite "Royal Guard" had as its main function the protection of the king and his family during the Old Kingdom. On the other hand, and as demonstrated throughout the article, there are indications regarding these elite units may actually have been used in warlike contexts. These soldiers would have been a heterogeneous elite force in the sense that, at its base, it would have two types of units:

1. Heavy infantry.
2. Chariot squadrons.

These unit's warfare typology will, inevitably, always be relate to the king's own situation in battle. That is, the way the king presented himself in battle, for tactical reasons his "Royal Bodyguard" should also coincide with that form. If the monarch was on foot, then his guard should also fight on the ground in a heavy infantry typology. If the Hittite king were in a chariot, then it would only make sense that the king's military protective unit would be positioned on the battlefield over chariots as well. While we should keep both possibilities open, the almost absence regarding mentions of war chariots in the used sources, we should be compelled to believe that these elite units were heavy infantry that would fight with spear and shield in a tight formation. Although the presence of war chariots is a possibility, we still lack more data in order to strengthen this idea. However, the existence of a weapon like the light war chariot during the Bronze Age, with the military and political importance it had in this kind of elite units, allows us to see this hypothesis as a probable fact. While the provenance of this military would be mostly Hittite, its actual quantification is currently impossible to prove with certainty. This is mainly due to the fact that the numbers previously offered are estimates, thus fallible either by default or by excess.

The "Protocol for the Royal Bodyguard" contains very important data concerning the troops operability inside the palace. However, for the scope of this article, the possible information comes mainly from associations between descriptions or features mentioned in the source in a palatial context, which can be transposed into a battle context. It seems evident to us that the king's presence in battle was always sided with his "personal guards" and these would also have to be in the same place to protect the monarch from possible dangers that might arise. For example, mobile war chariot unit engagements that could appear in an unexpected tactical position and within range of attacking the Hittite king or formation-breaking moments where enemy infantry units could approach the rear of the Hittite army.

It must be said that throughout the article and, in most cases, it was only possible to provide some clues and possibilities for a better understanding of the presence of these elite forces in battle. As in many other contexts related to the military history of some Bronze Age societies, there are large gaps of data. Because of this, we often do not possess a relatively complete set of information that allows us to offer decisive answers on certain issues.

The object of study here proposed, the Hittite “Royal Guard” units during the Old Kingdom, reflects these problems. Thus, we can only aim to create a survey that will keep the scientific discussion about this topic alive and ongoing.

In short, the presence of these forces in battle is very believable and the presence of a hierarchy within the actual elite unit is evident. The existence of regular soldiers (referred to as “spear-men”) suggests an effective presence on the battlefield, as well as the distinction between the “Royal Bodyguards” (MEŠEDI) and soldiers with “golden spears” in comparison with the regular guards. It is plausible to admit that these “spear-men” could themselves be the regular guards. Thus, the MEŠEDI and the “golden spears” would be the most capable and the closest contingent to the king, whereas if necessary, the remaining guard could go into combat, even if the monarch was not in danger. This understandable hierarchy would be present in the warlike context and its tactical positioning would reflect these same ranks within the elite unit itself. We can assume that the lower ranks would be in the front lines and as they approached the king, the ranks would be higher and higher. Based on the source and interpretation of the data provided by it, we can outline the following Hittite “royal guard” formation in battle: we can admit that the king would be at the center of the formation, that is, in the safest position. The closest soldiers to the monarch would be the MEŠEDI (highest hierarchical position), then would be the “gold-spear men” followed by the “heavy-spear men” and “bronze-spear men”, finally, in the first lines of defence would be the regular soldiers, the “spearmen”. We must safeguard that this is only an organization possibility and that it is issued with questionnaire and subject to change.

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