Hittite Empire and Society

- Hittite Kingdom was located in the central Anatolian Plateau known as the *Land of Hatti*
- It began around 1700 BCE and lasted about 500 years, during the Late Bronze Age
- The Hittites conquered much of Anatolia as well as northern Syria and the western edge of Mesopotamia
Hattusa

The capital was Hattusa (Ḫattušas), near the modern Turkish city of Boğazköy.

Anatolian Prehistory

- The native people of central Anatolia were known as the Hattians
- Speakers of a dialect of Proto-Indo-European entered Anatolia, probably via the Balkans, around 4000 BCE
- The PIE language speakers mixed with the native population, and Hittite civilization is thus a mixture of PIE features with native Anatolian cultural elements.
- The Hittite Empire was quite large and at times very powerful. Through absorbing neighboring peoples the society that resulted was a multicultral one in many respects.
Anatolian Languages

- Although Hittite is the best known of the Indo-European Anatolian languages, several others were in use, spoken in various regions of Anatolia.
- The best known among these is Luvian.
- The other Anatolian languages — Lycian, Milyan, Carian, Pisidian, Palaic and Lydian, are poorly attested.
- Both non-Indo-European Hattian and Indo-European Hittite remained spoken languages of central Anatolia. Hittite itself may have originally been a prestige language spoken by the ruling class; ultimately it appears to have become a formal language of administration and law. It is now thought that Luvian was probably, or eventually became, the ordinary language of much of Hittite society.

Distribution of Anatolian Languages
Periods of Hittite History: 1000 years

Old Kingdom  c. 1700 – 1400

New Kingdom or ‘Empire’  c. 1400 – c. 1175
• Hittite Empire at its height
• Hittite Emperor rivalled the Egyptian Pharaoh and the rulers of Assyria, Mittani and Babylon

Neo-Hittite Kingdoms of Syria c. 1175 - 708
• After the fall of the Empire, the Hittite dynasty continued to rule some small kingdoms in northern Syria.
• Hittite culture continued in this context
Hittite language

- Remains of the Hittite language were found in excavations of Hattusa, beginning in the late 19th century.
- Hittite was written in *cuneiform writing*, borrowed from the Akkadians, who had borrowed it from the inventors of cuneiform, the Sumerians.
- Sumerian and Akkadian were the ‘learned’ languages of the ancient Near East, comparable to Latin in medieval Europe.
- Consequently, when Hittite was written in cuneiform, sometimes the symbols denote Hittite words and other times they denote Akkadian or Sumerian words.
- This is a bit like our use of ‘Roman numerals’ *xi, cl* in English text.
Luvian

- The Luvian language is known from two sources: *cuneiform Luvian* and *hieroglyphic Luvian*.

- Cuneiform Luvian was written in the same way as Hittite

- Hieroglyphic Luvian used a special set of symbols unlike cuneiform.

- Inscriptions in Hieroglyphic Luvian are fairly plentiful and many are from the (later) neo-Hittite period. For this reason it is thought that Luvian was probably the language of the neo-Hittite kingdoms.

**Luvian Hieroglyphic Inscription in Hattusa**
Hittite Law

• Our knowledge of Hittite law comes mostly from a collection of texts called The Laws, which were compiled and recopied over many centuries.
• Multiple copies of The Laws have been preserved, four of which are dated to the Old Kingdom.
• The oldest parts of The Laws appear to date from around 1600 BCE.
• They refer to the first king of the Hittites, Labarna.
• We also have
  – records of court proceedings kept in the royal archives
  – anecdotes from the historical Palace Chronicle
  – records of disputes between the king’s vassals

Retribution vs. Compensation

• Hittite Law is interesting from two perspectives
  – how did Hittite Law differ from other law in the ancient Near East?
  – how did Hittite Law differ from contemporary concepts of justice?
• Legal penalties can in general be divided into two types
  – retribution: the offender is punished for misdeeds
  – compensation: the victim is given something to compensate for the loss incurred
• Early law, e.g. the Laws of Hammurabi, was often retributive: ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’
• Hittite Law is remarkable for its focus instead on compensation.
• It is also unusual in that it is not said to be divinely inspired.
• The Hittite approach to law was exceptionally pragmatic.
Punishment for Murder

- The murder victim’s family — or specifically the heir — was entitled to decide the fate of the murderer.
- Proclamation of King Telipinu (Old Kingdom):

  ‘If he [the heir] says: “Let him die,” he shall die; if he says “Let him make compensation”, he shall make compensation.

- In later times the death penalty fell out of use, unless preserved by a specific local custom.
- The murder victim’s family could then choose either material compensation or lifetime enslavement of the murderer.

Collective Responsibility

- A concept quite alien to modern law is collective responsibility: the idea that a family or community is responsible for the actions of its members and so can suffer punishment on behalf of any member’s actions
- For example, if a murder was committed on your property (but not by you), then if the victim was a man, you were obliged to give your property to the victim’s family. If the victim was a woman you had to pay 120 shekels of silver.
- If the murder was in an uncultivated field, any people living in a village within a specified radius of the spot were held liable.
- In the case of the gravest offenses, such as disobeying the king’s orders, the local official of the area where the offender lived might also be executed.
Power Structure

• Ultimate authority rested with the king, the deputy of the Sun God, but with such a large empire local authority had to be delegated to vassals who swore allegiance to the king.
• This ‘feudalist’ system of allegiance and obligation resembled that of medieval Europe.
• Most people lived in small, self-sustaining agricultural villages, separated by large tracts of uncultivated ‘no-man’s land’.
• Cities were unusual and Hattusa was quite exceptional in its large size.
• Every town had a council of Elders, older male heads of households. These represented the lowest level of judicial bodies.
• The King also appointed judicial magistrates — Lú-DUGUD — who passed judgment in his name. The Queen could also judge cases.

Sexual Offenses

• A fairly large portion of The Laws deals with sexual offenses, particularly bestiality and incest.
• Bestiality is subject to an odd set of strictures.
   — sex with a sheep was punished with death
   — sex with a horse or mule, however, was not punishable, but did pollute the person so he could not enter into the king’s palace or presence.
• Homosexuality is never mentioned in The Laws. Some have surmised that this was because the Hittites did not find it objectionable, but we do not know.