



Eating and Drinking  
in the Ancient Near East

Proceedings of the 67<sup>th</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique  
Internationale, Turin, July 12–16, 2021

Edited by Stefano de Martino,  
Elena Devecchi and Maurizio Viano

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# “Eat and drink, but do not look at my, the king’s, eyes!”

## On a Metaphorical Expression in Old Hittite

*Paola Dardano*

1. In Hittite the verbs for eating and drinking, together with their synonyms, are attested in some locutions where they have lost their literal value having assumed a metaphorical one.<sup>1</sup> Based on examples from Old Hittite historical and legal texts, this paper aims to elucidate some metaphorical expressions comprising the verbs *ed-/ad-* ‘to eat’ and *eku-/aku-* ‘to drink’. It is suggested that in the interaction between members of the royal family and/or officials, these expressions served a number of different communicative goals: they had an emphatic purpose, and their use was closely linked to the pragmatic context of interaction as well as to the role of the interlocutor.

Phraseological units are fixed expressions (of two or more words) that are idiomatic.<sup>2</sup> Fixedness is a crucial notion, which, together with non-compositionality and semantic opacity, has long been considered the defining feature of phraseological units. A lexical item is said to be non-compositional if its global meaning is different from the sum of its individual parts. Moreover, a given sequence is said to be opaque if, from the meaning of the elements that comprise it, one cannot reconstruct its global meaning. In this respect, an expression such as *to bite the dust* must be viewed as an idiom, a fixed and non-compositional semantic unit. It is important to consider both the literal and the figurative readings of a phraseme: even if one understands all of the words that make up the expression *tirer le diable par la queue* (lit. ‘pull the devil’s tail’), it is not enough to make it comprehensible. That figurative idioms have a figurative meaning is beyond a doubt. What is important is the role played by metaphor (and metonymy) in the creation and extension of the figurative meaning.

2. In the so-called Political Testament of Ḫattušili I, when the king adopted his grandson Muršili and asked the dignitaries gathered in Kuššara to recognise him

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the anonymous referee for very helpful comments and criticism that helped me improve this paper. I of course remain solely responsible for the contents.

<sup>2</sup> See Burger *et al.*, 2007; Granger / Meunier, 2008.

as the legal heir to the throne, the king's purpose was to guarantee the prosperity of the royal family and thus of the Hittite state. The king says "If you keep the father's word, you will [eat bread] and drink water", i.e. "you will be healthy, prosperous":

KUB 1.16+ III 28–32 – CTH 6

- 28 ... *ma-a-an at-ta-aš ut-tar pa-aḫ-ḫa-aš<sub>1</sub>-ta*  
 29 [NINDA-an e-ez-za-a]š-ši wa-a-tar-ra e-ku-uš-ši ma-a-an<sup>LÜ</sup>ma-ya-a[n-  
*d]a-ta[r]*  
 30 [*kar-di-it-ti nu-za UD-an II-ŠU III-ŠU e-it nu-za a-ar-š[i-i-ya-a]ḫ-ḫu<sup>1</sup>-ut*  
 31 [*ma-a-an(-ma ?)*<sup>LÜ</sup>ŠU.GI-tar-ra *kar-di-it-ti nu-za ni-in-ki-iḫ-ḫ[u-ut]* ]  
 32 [Ú-UL (?) *at-ta-aš-š]a ut-tar pé-e-eš-ši-ya*

If you keep your father's word, you [will eat bread] and drink water. When the prime of young adulthood is [within] you, then eat two or three times a day, and tr[ea]t yourself. [But when] old age is within you, drink your fill, [do not] set aside [(your) father's] word!<sup>3</sup>

A little later in the same text we read the fixed phrase 'to eat bread (and) drink water'. The dignitaries were repeatedly urged to respect what the king said; if they ignored his words, they would perish:

KUB 1.16+ III 46–49 – CTH 6

- 46 [*šu-me-eš-ma la-]ba<sup>2</sup>-ar-na-aš LUGAL.GAL ud-da-a-ar-me-et pa-aḫ-  
*ḫa-aš-nu-ut-te-en*  
 47 [*ma-a-na-a]t pa-aḫ-ḫa-aš-du-ma nu<sup>URU</sup>Ḫa-at-tu-ša-aš ša-ra-a ar-ta  
 KUR-še-me-et-ta*  
 48 [*wa-ar-a]š-nu-ut-te-ni NINDA-an az-za-aš-te-ni wa-a-tar-ra e-ku-ut-  
*te-ni ma-a-an*  
 49 [Ú-UL-m]a pa-aḫ-ḫa-aš-du-ma KUR-e-še-me-et ta-me-u-ma-an ki-i-  
*ša-ri***

[You] (my subjects) must keep my words, those of [L]abarna, the Great King. [As long as] you keep [them], Ḫattuša will stand tall, and you will set your land [at peace]. You will eat bread and drink water. But if you [do not] keep them, your land will fall under foreign control.<sup>4</sup>

The formula 'to eat bread (and) drink water' is also attested in the Old Hittite text KUB 36.110. It should be stressed that only in this passage do the direct objects in the accusative show the enclitic possessive pronouns (-š<sub>an</sub> and -š<sub>et</sub>, respec-

<sup>3</sup> Both here and in the subsequent passages of the Testament, Beckman (2003: 81) interprets the formula as exhorting a "Spartan lifestyle", and translates: "You must eat (only) bread and drink (only) water". I do not agree with this interpretation, but prefer to read it as 'to be safe and sound'. On the 'Political Testament' of Ḫattušili I, see also Goedegebuure, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> See also KUB 1.16+ III 33–39.

tively). As in the previous example, the formula probably signifies the munificence of the king in offering his subjects sustenance. However, the text is corrupt and interpretation remains uncertain. The force of the imperfective verb form *akkuške-* in line 7' compared to *eku-* in line 6' also remains obscure:

KUB 36.110 Vo 5'–7' – CTH 820.1

5' [   -]ta-aš-ši LUGAL-aš NINDA-ša-an a-du-e'[-ni]

6' [wa-a-ta]<sup>r</sup>-še-ta a-ku-e-ni na-aš-ta GAL GUŠKIN<sup>1</sup>-a[š]

7' [GEŠT]IN<sup>2</sup>-na-an pár-ku-in ak-ku-uš-ke-e-wa-ni

... of the king his bread we will ea[t.] We will drink his [wat]er<sup>2</sup>. From (lit. of) a gold cup we will begin to drink pure [win]e<sup>2</sup> (Hoffner, 2010: 131–132)

3. We will now consider other passages in which the phraseme ‘eat (and) drink’ can be interpreted in a different way. In his Testament, Ḫattušili I establishes Muršili as heir to the throne, and provides rules of conduct that are intended to consolidate the royal family and the Hittite state. Ḫattušili had initially chosen Labarna, his sister’s son, to be the heir to the throne, but as Labarna behaved badly towards him, he revoked appointing him as his successor. In the end Ḫattušili assigns him a house, land and animals and says, “Now he should eat and drink!”. If Labarna plans any evil against the king, he must stay in his house, i.e. he is no longer allowed to come to Ḫattuša and attend the court. It is important to note that both verbs *ed-* ‘to eat’ and *eku-* ‘to drink’ are in the imperfective form (*azzikke-* and *akkuške-*, respectively) and no direct object is given:

KUB 1.16+ II 31–36 – CTH 6

31 DUMU-mi la-ba-ar-ni É<sup>2</sup>[-i]<sup>r</sup> pé-eḫ-ḫ[u-un A.ŠÀ-še me-e]k-ki

32 pé-eḫ-ḫu-un GU<sub>4</sub><sup>HI.A</sup>-še me-e[k-k]i pé-eḫ-ḫu-u[n UDU<sup>HI.A</sup>-še me-ek-k]i  
pé-eḫ-ḫu-un

33 nu az-zi-ik-ki-id-du [a]k-[k]u-uš-ki-[i]d-d[u ma-a-na-aš aš-šu-uš]

34 na-aš-ta ša-ra-a ú-iš-<sup>1</sup>ki<sup>1</sup>-[i]t-ta-ru ma-a-a[n-ma-aš pu-ug-ga-a]n-za

35 ti-i-e-ez-zi na-aš-ma ku-uš-du[-wa-a-t]a ku-it-k[i na-aš-ma ḫar-nam-]  
ma ku-it-ki

36 na-aš-kán ša-ra-a le-e ú-iš[-k]i-it-ta n[a-aš É-ri-iš-ši e-eš-]du<sup>5</sup>

I have now given my son Labarna a hou[s]e. I have given him [arable land] in plenty. I have given him cattle in plenty. I have given [him sheep in plenty]. He shall continue to eat and drink (his fill). [As long as he is on his best behaviour], he shall come up from time to time (to Ḫattuša to visit). But if he begins [to cause trouble(?)], or (if he spreads) any slander, [or]

<sup>5</sup> The Akkadian version is very badly damaged at this point: only the precative *li-ku-ul* (I 32) from *akālu(m)* ‘to eat’ is preserved. This form corresponds to the Hittite phrase “he should eat” (in exile).

and [...], he will not be permitted to come up (again), but [shall remain on his own estate] (Beckman, 2003: 79–80).

In the same text, there is a good example of the use of *azzikke-* and *akkuške-* as opposed to ‘eat bread (and) drink water’ shortly after. Ḫattušili’s daughter had also turned against her father, but Ḫattušili managed to assert his power over her. He has banished her and prohibits her from returning to court.<sup>6</sup> He has assigned her a property in the countryside and forbids her to enter Ḫattuša with the words, “A house has been allotted to her in the country, now she shall eat and drink!”:

KUB 1.16+ III 16–25 – CTH 6

- 16 [ ]<sub>x</sub> *at-ta-aš ut-tar pé-e-eš-ši-i-e-et*  
 17 [*nu A-NA DUMU*<sup>MEŠ</sup> <sup>URU</sup>*ḪA-AT-TI e-eš-ḫ*]*ar-ši-mi-it e-ku-ut-ta ki-nu-na-aš*  
 18 [<sup>URU</sup>*az kat-ta u-i-ya-an-za ma-*]<sub>1</sub>*na-aš pá-r-nam-ma ú-iz-zi nu-kán É-ir-me-et*  
 19 [*wa-aḫ-nu-uz-zi ma-a-na-aš* <sup>UR</sup>]<sub>U</sub>*Ḫa-ḫat<sup>1</sup>-tu-ši-ma ú-iz-zi*  
 20 [*nu a-pu-u-un da-a-an e-d*]<sub>i</sub><sup>2</sup> *na-a-i ut-ne-e-še*  
 21 [*É-it tá-g-ga-aš-š*]*a-an nu az-zi-ik-ki-id-du*  
 22 [*ak-ku-uš-ki-id-* ]*du*

- 23 [*š-u-me-eš-ma-an i-da-a-lu le-*]*e i-ya-at-te-ni a-pa-a-aš i-da-a-lu i-e-et*  
 24 [*ú-uk i-da-a-lu EGIR-*]*pa*<sup>2</sup> *Ú-UL i-ya-am-mi a-pa-a-aš-mu-za at-ta-an*  
 25 [*Ú-UL ḫal-za-iš* ] *ú-ga-an-za DUMU.MUNUS*<sup>TI</sup> *Ú-UL ḫal-zi-iḫ-ḫi*

She has rejected (her) father’s word and has drunk [their blood, i.e. of the citizens of Ḫattuša]. Now she [has been banished from the city]. If she were to come to my household, [she would surely disrupt] my household. [If she] were to come to Ḫattuša, she would cause [it] to revolt [once more. A house has been allotted(?) to her in the country – now (she shall stay there, and) she shall eat (and) [drink]. (§) [You] shall not do [her any harm]. She did (me) harm, but I shall not do (her) [harm in return]. She [would not call] me father, so I shall not call her daughter (Beckman, 2003: 81).

The ‘eat (and) drink’ formula is also found in other texts of the Old Hittite tradition. A very similar passage occurs in an annalistic text dated to Muršili I that illustrates a military campaign against the Hurrians in eastern and southern Anatolia.<sup>7</sup> Although the text is corrupt, the king is probably speaking to his subjects:

KUB 31.64 (+) 64a + KBo 3.55 II 18’–20’ – CTH 12

- 18’       ... *ḫal-ma-aš-š*[*u-it-ti-mi*] *LUGAL-aš a-aš-š-u-me-et* [ ]  
 19’ [*me-e*]*k-ki ki-it-ta a*[*z-zi-ik-ki-it-te-en ak-*]*ku-uš-ki-ṭe-en* [ ]

<sup>6</sup> On this episode see Gilan, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See de Martino, 2003: 168–171.

20’ [DAM]<sup>MEŠ</sup>-*KU-NU DUMU<sup>MEŠ</sup>-KU-NU* ḥ[*u-uš-nu-ut-te-en ...*]  
 ... [on/in] my throne [ ] my, the king’s, wealth lies [in ab]undance. E[at  
 (and) d]rink! K[ee]p alive] your [wife] (and) your children!

Shortly after, the same wording is repeated:

KUB 31.64 (+) 64a + KBo 3.55 II 27’–29’ – CTH 12  
 27’ ... LUGAL-*aš a-aš-šu-me-et*]  
 28’ *me-ek-ki ki-<sub>1</sub>it<sub>1</sub>-ta az-zi-ik-ki-it-te-en ak-ku-uš-ki<sub>9</sub>-te-en* DAM<sup>MEŠ</sup>-  
*KU-NU DUMU<sup>MEŠ</sup>-KU-NU*]  
 29’ ḥ*u-uš-nu-ut-tén*  
 [My, the king’s,] wealth lies in abundance. Eat (and) drink! K[ee]p alive  
 your wife (and) your children!]

It is also interesting to compare a passage from an Old Hittite legal text. In the Telipinu Edict we read that Ḫuzziya became king, but he had a brother-in-law, Telipinu, whom he feared as a rival and so planned to kill once he – Ḫuzziya – was on the throne. Telipinu learned of the plot, drove off the would-be murderers, and ascended the throne himself. He then felt that he had to be rid of Ḫuzziya’s five brothers. According to the usual practice, they were sent away from court and were confined to houses that Telipinu had given them:

KBo 3.1++ II 13–15 – CTH 19  
 13 V Š[E]<sup>MEŠ</sup>-*ŠU nu-uš-ma-aš É<sup>MEŠ</sup> tág-ga-aš-ta pa-a-an-du-wa-az a-  
 ša-an-du*  
 14 *nu-wa-[z] a az-zi-ik-kán-du ak-ku-uš-kán-du i-da-a-lu-ma-aš-ma-aš-  
 kán le-e ku[-iš-ki]*  
 15 *tág-ga-aš-ši nu tar-ši-ki-mi a-pé-e-wa-mu i-da-lu i-e-ir ú-ga-wa-ru-uš*  
 ḪUL-lu<sup>1</sup> [Ú-UL *i-ya-mi*]

Five (were) his (i.e., Ḫuzziya’s) br[ot]hers and he assigned houses to them (saying): “Let them go (and) live! Let them each eat (and) drink! May nob[ody] do harm them!”. And I declare: “They did evil to me, but I [will not do] evil to them”.

The formula ‘eat (and) drink’ probably denotes the banishment of Ḫuzziya and his brothers. They are not condemned to death, but a certain location (unknown to us) is assigned to them as punishment. The same episode is described in the annalistic text KBo 12.8 (with the parallel KBo 12.9), which offers a first-person account of Telipinu. Here the “eat (and) drink” formula does not occur, but there is little doubt that *parnaš=šmaš tarnā-* ‘leave in their homes’ conveys the same meaning:

KBo 12.8 Vo IV 20’–23’ – CTH 20.A  
 20’ <sup>m</sup>*Ḫu-uz-zi-ya-aš-š[a-an]’ Ú ŠEŠ<sup>MEŠ</sup>-ŠU’*  
 21’ *pár-na-aš-ma-aš tar-na-aḥ[-ḫu-un pa-an-du-wa-az]*  
 22’ *a-ša-an-du ḪUL-l[(u-ma-w)a-aš-ma-aš-kán le-e]*

23' *ku-iš-ki ták-ki*[-e-eš-zi]

Ḫuzziya [and his brothers] I lea[ve] in their homes: “[They should go] (and they should stay (lit. be) (there), but [no] one should h[(arm)] them”.

It is worth noting that the formula, together with the prohibition to look at the king's eyes (i.e., not to visit the king), occurs in a royal edict and probably refers to the banishment of Ḫattušili's daughter. A woman called the daughter is sent away from the capital Ḫattuša, and it is a mark of the king's leniency that she is merely banished. She is given fields and herds so that she can support herself, but she is forbidden from returning to court:

KBo 3.24+KBo 53.275+ Ro 10'–18'

10' *ṽTa-wa-n*[a-an-na

11' *at-ta-aš-š*[a(-)

12' *ut-ni-ya-an-d*[a-

13' *ú-ga* DUMU.MUNUS<sup>TI</sup>[

14' *da-aḫ-ḫu-un* DUMU.M[UNUS<sup>?</sup>

15' *ša-na-aš-ta* <sup>URU</sup>*Ḫa-a*[t-tu-

16' *ú-ṽe<sup>1</sup>-em<sup>1</sup>-ya na-at-ta* x[

17' ***az-zi-ki-i ak-ku-uš-ki-ya*** <sup>URU</sup>*Ḫa-a*[t-tu-ši-ma LUGAL-wa-aš (?)]

18' *ša-a-ku-wa le-e a-ṽú<sup>1</sup>-u*[t-ti

10' Tawana[nna

11' [an]d [the words] of the father

12' [the] population [

13' and I (my) daughter [

14' I took. [The dau]ghter [

15' and them [in] Ḫa[ttuša

16' find! Not... [

17' “Eat and drink! In Ḫa[ttuša

18' do not look at the eyes [of the king]!

This fragment probably refers to the preventive measures that Ḫattušili made regarding his daughter in the Testament.<sup>8</sup> The daughter was banished from court, but her personal safety and well-being were guaranteed. She was provided with a small estate stocked with cattle and sheep outside the capital, but she was not allowed to return to Ḫattuša. This was done in a spirit of reconciliation that Ḫattušili wanted to encourage all his subjects to adopt.

This text is an old Hittite decree, which has been handed down in a New Hittite copy, but probably goes back to the time of Muršili I.<sup>9</sup> In the same text the author anecdotally describes an episode at the royal court in which he himself took part.

<sup>8</sup> See above, KUB 1.16+ III 16–25.

<sup>9</sup> On the new joins see Marazzi, 2019–2020.



The prince of the city of Puruṣḥanda rebelled against Ḫattuša and was – as is figuratively described – “put into the hand (of the Hittite king)” by the gods (KBo 3.28 II 6’–7’), i.e., was defeated. We do not know anything about his fate or punishment, but the family of the rebellious prince was treated with mercy and was not harmed. His wife and sisters were spared, and the king addressed them with the solemn formula: “Go, eat and drink, but do not look at my, the king’s, eyes!”. In this passage, the expression ‘eat (and) drink’ can be read as a formula of banishment: the female relatives of the rebellious prince are not put to death, but cannot be admitted into the king’s presence, i.e., they cannot ‘look at the king’s eyes’:<sup>10</sup>

KBo 3.28++ II 6’–9’– CTH 9.6

6’ ... šu-mu DINGIR<sup>DIDL</sup> DUMU<sup>URU</sup> Pu-r[u-uš-ḫa-an-du-um-na-an]

7’ ki-iš-ri-mi da-i-ir LUGAL-uš A-NA DAM-ŠU ne-ga-aš-š[a]-aš-ša

8’ i-it-te-en az-zi-ki<sub>9</sub>-te-en ak-ku-uš-ki<sub>9</sub>-te-en LUGAL-wa-ša

9’ ša-a-<sup>r</sup>ku<sup>1</sup>-wa-me-et le-e uš-te-ni

The gods put the prince of Pur[uṣḥanda] into my hand and I, the king, said to his wife and his sisters: “Go, eat and drink, but do not look at my, the king’s, eyes!”

From this it can be concluded that the victorious ruler pardoned the female relatives of the prince, but banished them as their presence could no longer be tolerated. This text strengthens the hypothesis that the phrase ‘eat (and) drink’ is a formula for banishment. The wife and sisters of the rebellious prince are allowed to live, but they are abandoned to their fate and can no longer take part in the life of the court.

4. Our results can be tentatively summarised as follows. The phraseme ‘eat (and) drink’ has a twofold purpose. When the two verbs take the suffix *-ške-*, are in the imperative form and are absolute (that is, they are not accompanied by any direct object, but refer solely to the subject), we have a banishment formula. The king is solemnly speaking to high dignitaries or members of the royal family: ‘eat and drink’ thus means ‘you are alive, your life is saved’, i.e., ‘you are not sentenced to death, but you are banished from court’. On the other hand, if the two verbs have an object in the accusative, i.e., ‘eat bread’ and ‘drink water’, the expression should be taken more literally: it means ‘to stay alive, be safe and sound’. We can therefore conclude that it is not the lexical choice, but the morphosyntactic structure that allows us to distinguish between the two formulas. As shown in Table 1, there is conclusive evidence that the metaphorical use ‘eat (and) drink’ is distinct from the non-metaphorical ‘eat bread (and) drink water’:

<sup>10</sup> On *šakuwa auš-* as a loan translation from Akk. *ēn(ē) X amāru(m)* ‘to visit’, lit. ‘to see the eyes (of someone)’, see Dardano, 2010.

Table 1

	imperative	-ške-suffix	no direct object	
KBo 3.1++ II 14	+	+	+	metaphorical use <i>azzikke- akkuške-</i>
KBo 3.28 II 8'	+	+	+	
KUB 1.16+ II 33	+	+	+	
KUB 1.16+ III 21–22	+	+	+	
KUB 31.64++ II 19'	+	+	+	
KBo 3.24+ Ro 17'	+	+	+	
KUB 1.16+ III 29	–	–	–	non-metaphor- ical use NINDA <i>ed-</i> + <i>watar eku-</i>
KUB 1.16+ III 34	–	–	–	
KUB 1.16+ III 48	–	–	–	
KUB 36.100 Vo 5'–6'	–	–	–	

5. This analysis has demonstrated the varied phraseology associated with verbs for eating and drinking. In particular, it has highlighted the major role played by metaphor in the creation and extension of new phrasal patterns. What makes these idioms stand out from other phrasemes is their high degree of idiomaticity, which manifests itself in semantic opacity in addition to a distinct figurative element.

It is clear from these remarks that phraseology can be a springboard for stimulating further study. Indeed, there is a close connection between culture and phraseology. This is best revealed by proverbs and fully idiomatic set phrases, as they tend to rely heavily on images, traditions and habits that are characteristic of a given culture. Phraseology can be seen as the linguistic repository of a number of culturally specific traditions.

Phrasemes revealing cultural models that belong to a group provide information about the values that that culture upholds. In doing so, they also express the rules that govern social behaviour in a specific culture. This demonstrates the importance of studying conventional figurative language, not only to reveal its cultural content, but also to explore fully the link between figurative language and culture.

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