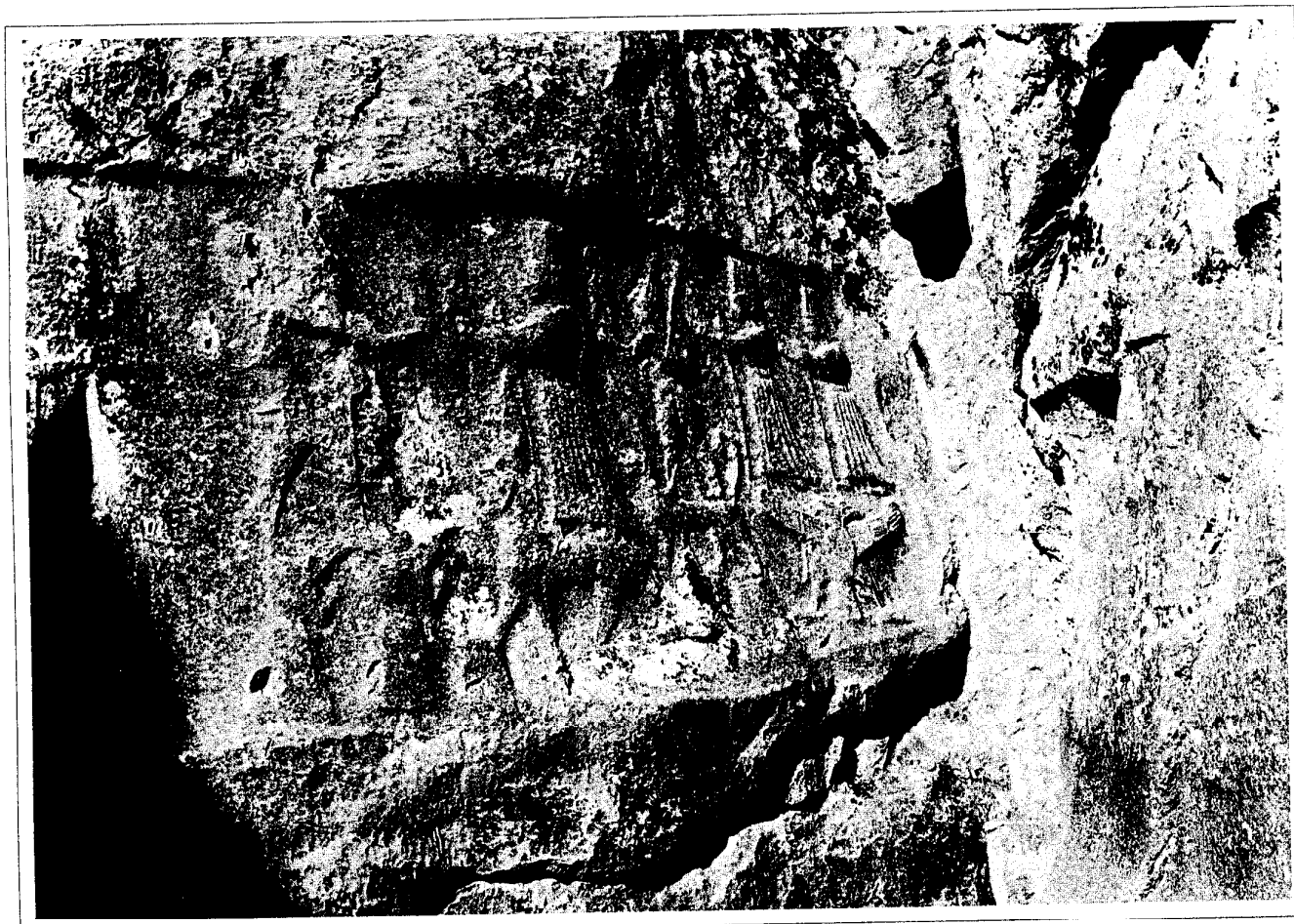


The Religion of the HITTITES

by Gary Beckman



The recovery of Hittite religion is difficult because the creators of the available textual sources did not intend to convey a coherent picture to outsiders. The knowledge we have depends chiefly on the thousands of cuneiform tablets discovered in the ruins of the royal city of Hattuşa, modern-day Boğazköy. Among these tablets, however, there are no canonical scriptures, no theological disquisitions or discourses, no aids to private devotion (Laroche 1971;

Bittel 1970: chapter 1). Rather, the scribes employed by the Hittite kings compiled their archives in the service of the royal administration. These records aided the bureaucracy in the organization and maintenance of all areas of royal responsibility, many of which the modern observer would consider to be religious.

The study of Hittite religion must therefore be based on various types of practical documents: temple regulations and records of cultic administration, prescriptions for the

In this relief from the main chamber of the rock sanctuary Yazılıkaya, located just outside the city walls of Hattuşa, a procession of male gods (to the left) led by the Weather-God greets a procession of goddesses led by the Sun-Goddess of Arinna, here given her Hurrian name Hebat. This grand procession, which wraps itself around the contours of the rock, presumably represents the divine court attendant during the celebration of the new year's festival. The Weather God wears a tall horned cap, characteristic of his divinity and rank. He stands on two bending Mountain-Gods and greets the Sun-Goddess, who wears a flattened, cone-shaped hat and stands on a lioness. Photo by Jeanny Vorys Canby.

Hittite religion was concerned with the central preoccupation of peasant life: the fertility of crops, animals, and people.

proper performance of ceremonies, reports of diviners, religious compositions used in scribal education, and so on. Most of the tablets that we have date to the last 50 years or so of the Hittite Empire, although some earlier compositions are available, either as original tablets or in later copies.

To the textual evidence may be added the testimony of other archaeological discoveries, including a few small divine images and other cult objects (Güterbock 1983), the iconography displayed on seals (Beran 1967; Mora 1987) and rock reliefs (Kohlmeyer 1983; Alexander 1986), and ground plans of temples (Bittel 1970: 55–59; Neve 1987).

General Character of Hittite Religion

At its base, Hittite religion was concerned with the central preoccupation of peasant life on the central plateau: the fertility of crops, domestic animals, and people. This interest is clearly expressed in an excerpt from a prayer:

To the king, queen, princes, and to (all) the land of Ḫatti give life, health, strength, long years, and joy (in?) the future! And to them give future thriving of grain, vines, fruit, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, mules, asses—together with wild animals—and of human beings!¹

The world of the primitive farmer and herdsman is reflected throughout Hittite religion. The chief deity retained the clear features of a growth-sustaining Storm-God, even while presiding over the political structure of the Hittite Empire (Goetze 1957: 138–42; Deighton 1982). Geographic elements such as springs and mountains, both conceived as sources of fructifying

water, played an important role, and the cultivation of grain and the increase of herds were each represented by a deity (Hoffner 1974: 82–85; Beckman 1983: 55–56). The Hittites naturally endeavored to understand the numinous through imagery drawn from the daily experience of peasant life. Thus the character and majesty of many deities were made manifest through an association with some animal, wild or domestic. Gods were frequently depicted as standing on their associated beasts; some were even represented in animal form (Lebrun 1985).

The Pantheon

The most prominent figures in the state cult were a Storm-God, who was brought into Anatolia by the Indo-European newcomers, and a kind of Sun-Goddess borrowed from the indigenous Hattic people. In spite of her designation, the latter deity was chthonic, or infernal, in character and was a member of the long line of Anatolian fertility gods reaching from the so-called Mother-Goddess of Çatal Höyük in the sixth millennium all the way to Cybele and Diana of the Hellenistic period. This divine couple were presumably worshiped in the twin cellas of Ḫattuša's largest temple.

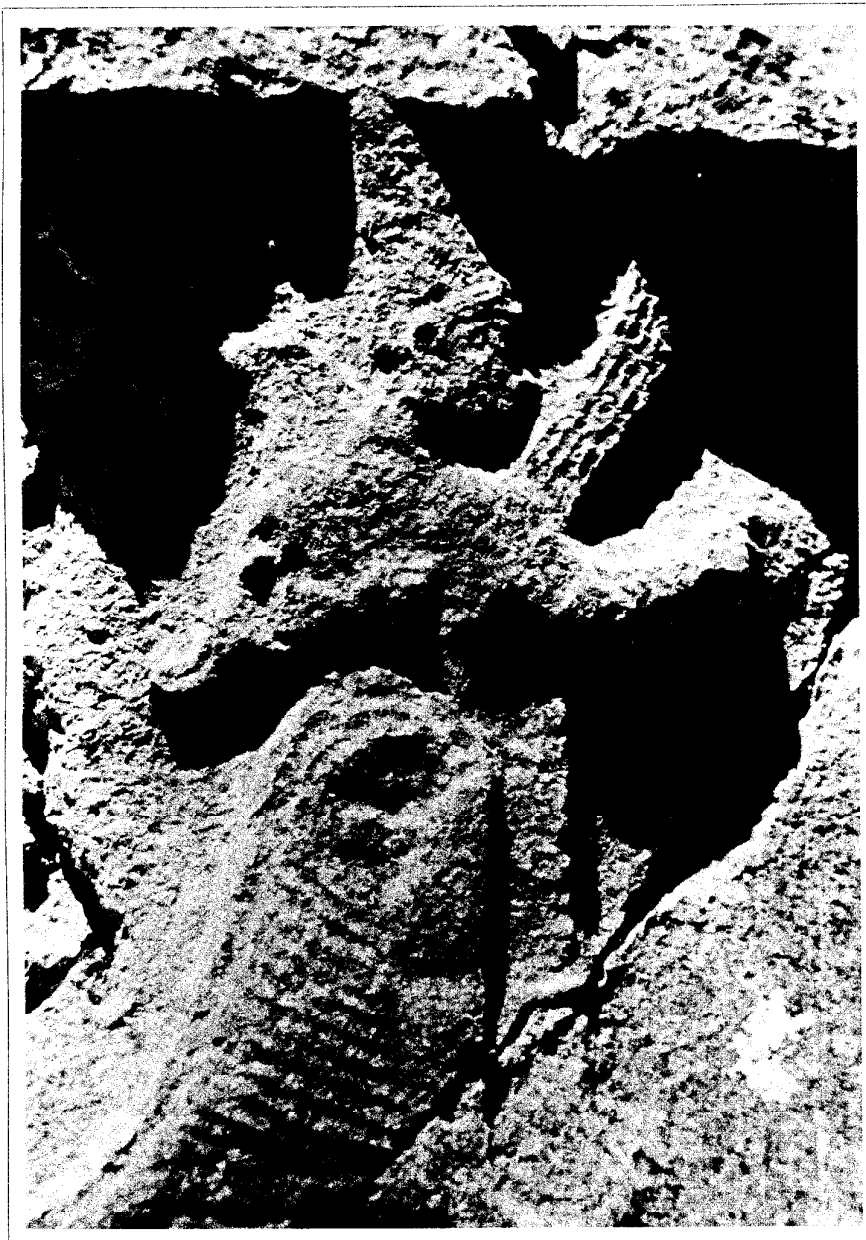
The number of individual deities mentioned in the Hittite texts is staggering (Laroche 1947; Gurney 1977: 4–23). The Hittites themselves referred to their "thousand gods," but many of these figures are cited infrequently in the texts and remain little more than names to us today. This multiplicity is due in part to a resistance to syncretization. For example, many Hittite towns maintained individual storm-gods, declining to identify the local deities as manifes-

tations of a single national figure.

As the Hittite state expanded from its core in central Anatolia, the range of gods mentioned in the royal archives came to include deities that were worshiped in the urban centers of Syria and Mesopotamia as well as those of Indo-European and Hattic origin. In the earliest period, the Hattic deities of cult centers such as Nerik (Haas 1970) and Ḫattuša predominated, later to be joined by increasing numbers of newcomers at home in regions to the south and east. The Luwian deities of Ḫuḫešna, Iṣtanuwa, and Lallupiya, and particularly the Hurrian gods of Šamuḫa (Lebrun 1976), Kummanni, Karkamiš, and Aleppo should be mentioned here. Lists of divine witnesses to treaties present the imperial pantheon most clearly (Kestemont 1976), although it is puzzling that these groupings omit several otherwise prominent deities.

In the thirteenth century B.C.E. some efforts were made at systemization, and many divinities were grouped into *kaluti*, or "circles" of males and females, as depicted visually in the bas-relief processions of Yazılıkaya. It is significant that, although their iconography makes most of these deities immediately recognizable as long-standing members of the Hittite pantheon, their hieroglyphic labels give their names in Hurrian (Laroche 1948, 1952). That is, syncretization had finally been carried out. This process is also reflected by an invocation from a prayer of queen Puduḫepa:

Sun-Goddess of Arinna, my lady, you are the queen of all lands! In the land of Ḫatti you have assumed the name Sun-Goddess of Arinna, but in respect to the land which you



have made (the land) of cedars
(that is, Syria), you have as-
sumed the name Hebat.²

This systematizing approach reflected the opinion of only a small group at the Hittite court, however, and at no time was a single unitary hierarchy of gods established.

The Place of the King

To the Hittites, the universe was a continuum. There was no strict separation between gods and humans. The two classes of beings were interdependent and existed alongside the world of plants and animals, from which both ultimately drew their sustenance. The gods were literally dependent on the offerings presented by humans, who, conversely, could thrive only when the deities who controlled the basic processes of nature were well disposed toward the agriculturists and stock-breeders. This situation is well illustrated by a complaint of king Muršili II:

All of the land of Hatti is dying, so that no one prepares the sacrificial loaf and libation for you (the gods). The plowmen who used to work the fields of the gods have died, so that no one works or reaps the fields of the gods any longer. The miller-women who used to prepare



Above: The many faceted Semitic goddess Istar, whose realm included sexuality and armed combat, appears frequently in texts dating to the Middle Kingdom as well as the Empire period of Hittite history. The goddess is shown here as part of the long procession of gods in the main chamber of Yazılıkaya. Photo by Ronald L. Gorny. Left: This modern impression of the seal of Ehli-kuša illustrates the iconography of two important Hittite deities. On the left stands the Storm-God, holding his mace and the "w"-hieroglyph representing his name. The figure on the right wears the robes and skull-cap common to the Sun-God and the human king, but the sun disc above his head assures us that it is the deity who is intended here. Photo courtesy of the Yale Babylonian Collection (16575).

At death, the king was said
“to become a god” and began
to receive cultic observances.

sacrificial loaves of the gods have died, so that they no longer make the sacrificial loaves. As for the corral and sheepfold from which one used to cull the offerings of sheep and cattle – the cowherds and shepherds have died, and the corral and sheepfold are empty. So it happens that the sacrificial loaves, libation(s), and animal sacrifices are cut off. And you come to us, o gods, and hold us culpable in this matter!³

The monarch occupied a central position in Hittite ideology (Güterbock 1954; Gurney 1958). He was the linchpin of the universe, the point at which the sphere of the gods met that of human beings. As chief priest of the Sun-Goddess of Arinna, the king was responsible for the proper service of the gods by humankind and, in turn, represented human society before the awesome power of the gods. In a ritual dating to the Old Hittite period, the monarch speaks of his charge:

The gods, the Sun-God and the Storm-God, have entrusted to me, the king, the land and my household, so that I, the king, should protect my land and my household for myself⁴

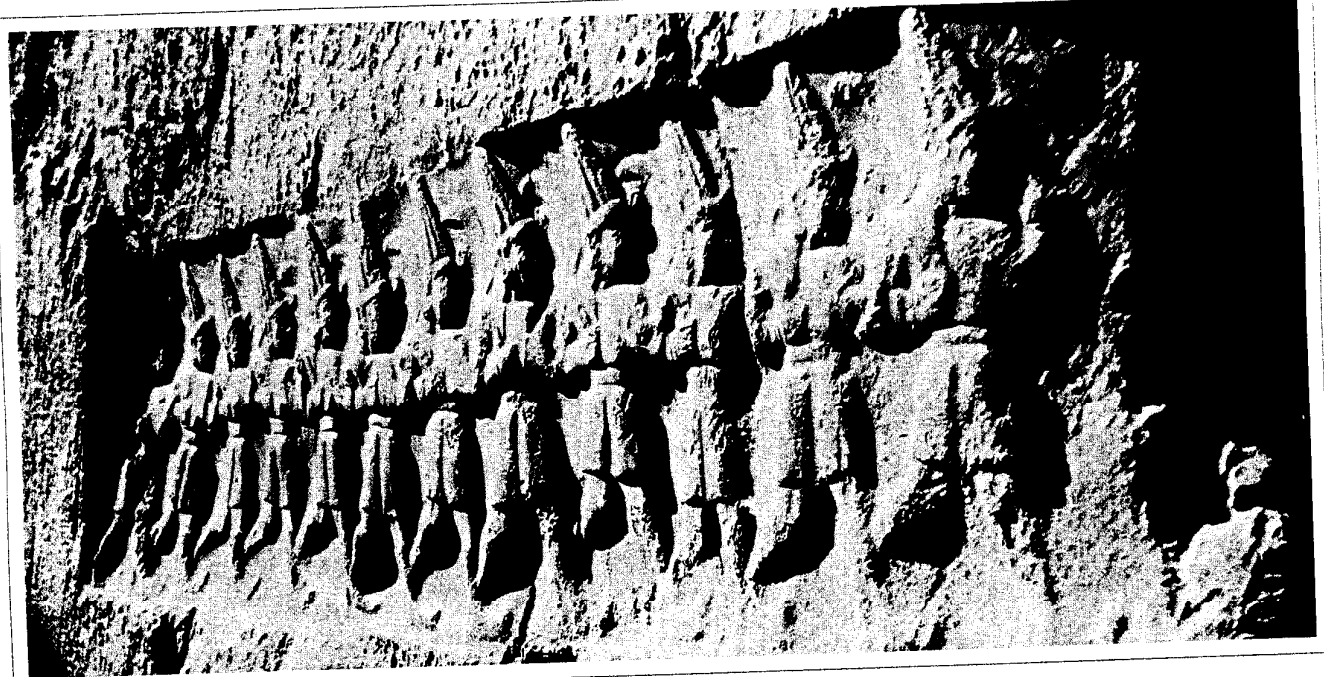
Although to a certain extent the king was identified with the male Sun-God, as shown by his costume and his title “My Sun” (Kellerman 1978), he was not deified until after his death, at which time he was said “to become a god” and began to receive cultic observances (Otten 1958). Indeed, it is believed that a section of Yazılıkaya served as the mortuary temple of king Tudhaliya IV (Bittel 1970: chapter 4).

The queen, in turn, had a special relationship with the Sun-Goddess (Bin-Nun 1975: 197–202), and all



In Hittite ideology there was no strict separation between gods and humans. Gods depended on humans for offerings, and humans depended on gods for good harvests. The king occupied a central position in this interdependent relationship, representing the point at which the sphere of the gods met that of human beings. As chief priest, he was responsible for the proper service of the gods by humankind and, in turn, acted as the representative of human society before the awesome power of the gods. The relationship between a king and his personal god is seen in this rock relief, also from Yazılıkaya, which shows Tudhaliya IV in the embrace of his personal god Sarruma. Notice the tall horned cap worn by Sarruma and the king's cartouche in the upper righthand corner. Photo by Jeanny Vorvs Canby.

In the small chamber at Yazılıkaya, twelve gods carrying scimitars over their shoulders are shown running in unison, their bodies overlapping. These gods, who are also shown at the end of the long procession in the main chamber, were apparently part of the divine court attendant at the new year's festival performed in honor of the Storm God. Photo by Ronald L. Gorny.



defunct members of the royal family received occasional offerings (Otten 1951). All households were responsible for the service of their ancestors (Archi 1979b), however, so the afterlife of Hittite royalty was probably just a grander version of that awaiting the ordinary person.

The State Cult

The needs and desires of the Hittite gods were conceived of as being similar to those of humans of high rank. The temple of a god was simply his house, and strict regulations governed the service and behavior of priests within its precincts (Korošec 1974). Temples housing the most important divinities were large establishments containing many storerooms and workshops where products necessary for divine service were produced (Güterbock 1975). Outside the city extensive tracts of

agricultural land were devoted to the support of these divine households, and, consequently, the temples were an important part of the Hittite economy (Klengel 1975).

The primary religious functions of the state were carried out in the numerous temples of the capital, but the king and his government were also ultimately responsible for the more modest shrines that served minor deities throughout Hatti. We are indebted to a census made of local cults during the late thirteenth century B.C.E. for information about the worship and iconography of many Hittite deities (von Brandenstein 1943; Carter 1962). The following report on the cult of a small village is typical:

The town Lapana, (chief deity) Iyaya: the divine image is a female statuette of wood, seated and veiled, one cubit (in height).

Her head is plated with gold, but the body and throne are plated with tin. Two wooden mountain sheep, plated with tin, sit beneath the deity to the right and left. One eagle plated with tin, two copper staves, and two bronze goblets are on hand as the deity's cultic implements. She has a new temple. Her priest, a male, is a holdover.⁵

Regardless of whether his temple was large or small, within his cella the deity was cared for—fed and clothed—by his priesthood. Because these activities were performed routinely, they are rarely discussed in the texts, but the texts do give information about the special divine festivals or parties that were held in honor of these deities (Güterbock 1969–1970). The schedule of worship varied for each deity; some festivals were held monthly or yearly,

If the requisite worship was performed according to its stringent requirements, the deities were pleased and favored the king.

whereas others marked particular moments in the agricultural calendar, such as the reaping of a harvest or the cutting of grapes. In general, fall festivals featured the filling of storage vessels with the bounty of the harvest, while spring festivals centered around the opening of these vessels. It seems that a new year's festival was performed in honor of the Storm-God of Ḫattuša in the main galleries of Yazılıkaya (Otten 1956); the divine court attendant upon this occasion is depicted in the reliefs executed there.

Because the celebration of important festivals for the most prominent deities throughout central Anatolia required the presence of the king, these festivals were organized into a spring and a fall series, known collectively (and respectively) as the *festival of the crocus* (Güterbock 1960) and the *festival of haste* (Kořak 1976). During the spring tour the king was required to travel for at least 38 days, although in some instances it was permitted for the queen, a prince, or even a symbolic animal hide to substitute for the monarch.

Hittite festivals generally consisted of food offerings, often in the form of a communal meal uniting god and worshippers (Archi 1979a), toasts to the deities (Kammenhuber 1971), and entertainment. The gods were amused in various ways: through athletic competitions, such as foot races, horse races, and the throwing of heavy stones, through mock battles, and through the antics of jesters. The gods were also treated to music performed by various types of musicians on a wide variety of instruments (Gurney 1977: 34–35). Unfortunately we know very little about the character of Hittite music

or the lyrics sung, for specific information was usually not recorded (Kümmel 1973).

If the requisite worship was performed on time and according to its stringent requirements, the deities were pleased with and favored the king, granting him personal longevity and numerous offspring and running before him in battle. In turn the Hittite state and its inhabitants prospered. Most important, Hittite armies were victorious, and Hittite farmers raised bumper crops. But if for any reason the gods were unhappy with how the worship was performed, they might invoke sanctions resulting in the most negative effects, from personal sickness to national calamity. Indeed, almost any ill was interpreted as a manifestation of divine anger. After much effort, for example, Muřšili II learned that divine displeasure at a neglected festival and a broken treaty with Egypt was the cause of the plague afflicting Ḫatti.

Descriptions of Hittite festivals are monotonous to read because the largely repetitive ceremonies are described in minute detail. This passage should convey the flavor of these compositions:

The king and queen, seated, toast the War-God. The *ḫalliyari*-men (play) the large INANNA-instruments and sing. The clapper-priest claps. The cup-bearer brings one snack-loaf from outside and gives (it) to the king. The king breaks (it) and takes a bite. The palace functionaries take the napkins from the king and queen. The crouching (cupbearer) enters. The king and queen, standing, toast the (divinized) Day. The jester speaks; the clapper claps, the

kita-man cries "aḫa!"⁶

Our knowledge of native Anatolian mythology is drawn largely from such texts, for tales of primordial activities by the gods were sometimes recited during a festival as a way of encouraging the gods to maintain the order of the world they had established long before. Thus, two versions of the struggle between the Storm-God and a cosmic serpent were told during the course of a spring festival (Beckman 1982).

Ritual

In contrast to the festivals, which were performed at regular intervals, another category of rite was intended for use only as the situation required. Such ceremonies are usually referred to as rituals. Texts describing these ceremonies give us our best view of popular religion because many were not composed in Ḫattuša but were collected by royal scribes throughout the Hittite realm. In most of the ancient Near East, rituals were recorded anonymously, but in Ḫatti such compositions were often named after the practitioner from whom they were elicited. Although the so-called author of a ritual is occasionally said to be a priest, more often female experts in magic bear the title "old woman," and men are referred to as "seer."

Many Hittite rituals were rites of passage intended to ease the transition of an individual from one stage or station in life to another. Thus we have many texts describing rituals for birth (Beckman 1983), one for puberty (Güterbock 1969), and several for death (Otten 1958). Rituals for the enthronement of the monarch are alluded to (Kümmel 1967), but no actual text has survived. The purpose of the majority of rituals, how-

Myth of Illuyanka

A few of the mythological texts from the Hittite archives have attracted as much attention as this one (CTH 321) which narrates the combat of the Storm-God with a foe designated simply by the Hittite common noun for snake or serpent, *illuyanka*. Although all of the preserved tablets whose size is sufficient to allow dating belong to the Empire period, there can be little doubt that this text itself is an Old Hittite composition. Many archaic grammatical features support this judgment.

Other commentators have discussed many aspects of this text, for example, its reflection of Anatolian marriage customs, its use of widely attested folkloristic motifs, and its relationship to Greek mythology. For my part, I would stress that the two mythological narratives of CTH 321, like all known examples of what Haris Güterbock has termed *Anatolian mythology*, are contained within a ritual context. §§ 1 and 2 make this explicit – the *purulli*-festival is performed both when, and in order that, the land should thrive, and the myths are the texts of this festival. These tales clearly present several religious etiologies, the most important of which is the establishment of a royal cult in the town of Kiškilussa, but more significant is the provision of a mythological paradigm for a human situation. Hittite society had to cope with and understand the alternation of periods of growth and stagnation. The obvious symbolizing in CTH 321 of the former by the Storm-God and of the latter by the serpent has led to the interpretation of the entire myth as basically an example of the Frazerian Dying God myth, but I feel that the resolution of the crisis of the seasons through the combined efforts of humans and deities is the most significant element here.

In the first version of the myth, only the help of Hupašiya enables the Storm-

- §1 (This is) the text of the *purulli* (festival) for the [. . .] of the Storm-God of Heaven, according to Kella, [the "anointed priest"] of the Storm-God of Nerik: When they speak thus –
- §2 "Let the land grow (and) thrive, and let the land be secure (literally 'protected')!" – and when it (indeed) grows (and) thrives, then they perform the festival of *purulli*.
- §3 When the Storm-God and the serpent came to grips in (the town of) Kiškilussa, the serpent smote the Storm-God.
- §4 (Thereafter) the Storm-God summoned all the gods (saying): "Come in! Inara has prepared a feast!"
- §5 She prepared everything in great quantity – vessels of wine, vessels of (the drink) *marnuwan* (and) vessels of (the drink) [*walhi*]. In the vessels she made] an abundance.
- §6 Then [Inara] went [to] (the town of) Ziggarratta and encountered Hupašiya, a mortal.
- §7 Inara spoke as follows to Hupašiya: "I am about to do such-and-such a thing – you join with me!"
- §8 Hupašiya replied as follows to Inara: "If I may sleep with you, then I will come and perform your heart's desire!" [And] he slept with her.
- §9 Then Inara transported Hupašiya] and concealed him. Inara dressed herself up and invited the serpent up from his hole (saying): "I'm preparing a feast – come eat and drink!"
- §10 Then the serpent came up together with [his children], and they ate (and) drank – they dra[nk] up every vessel and were sated.
- §11 They were no longer able to go back down into (their) hole, (so that) Hupašiya came and tied up the serpent with a cord.
- §12 The Storm-God came and slew the serpent. The (other) gods were at his side.
- §13 Then Inara built a house on a rock (outcropping) in (the town of) Tarukka and settled Hupašiya in the house. Inara instructed him: "When I go out into the countryside, you must not look out the window! If you look out, you will see your wife (and) your children!"
- §14 When [Inara went away and] the twentieth day had passed, he looked out the win[dow] and [saw] his wife (and) [his] children.
- §15 When Inara returned from the countryside, he began to whine: "Let me (go) back home!"
- §16 Inara spoke as follows [to Hupašiya: " . . .] away [. . .] [. . .] with anger [. . .] the meadow of the Storm-God [. . .] she killed" him.
- §17 Inara [went] to (the town of) Kiškil[ussa] (and) set her' house and [the river] of the watery abyss [into] the hand of the king – because [in commemoration thereof] we are (re-)performing the first *purulli*-festival – the hand [of the king will hold: the house] of Inara and the river] of the watery abyss.
- §18 [The divine mountain] Zaliyanu is fir[st] (in rank) among all (the gods). When he has allotted rain in (the town of) Nerik, then the herald brings forth a loaf of *harsi*-bread from Nerik.
- §19 He had asked Zaliyanu for rain, and he brings it to him (on account of) the bread
(several damaged lines followed by a gap of about 40 lines)
- §20 This [. . .]
- §21 Because [. . .] spoke. The ser[pent] defeated the Storm-God

- and took (his) heart and eyes. And him the Storm-God [. . .]
- §22 And he took as his wife the daughter of a poor man, and he sired a son. When he grew up, he took as his wife the daughter of the serpent.
- §23 The Storm-God instructed (his) son: "When you go to the house of your wife, then demand from them (my) heart and eyes!"
- §24 When he went, then he demanded from them the heart, and they gave it to him. Afterwards he demanded from them the eyes, and they gave these to him. And he carried them to the Storm-God, his father, and the Storm-God (thereby) took back his heart and his eyes.
- §25 When he was again sound in body as of old, then he went once more to the sea for battle. When he gave battle to him and was beginning to smite the serpent, then the son of the Storm-God was with the serpent and shouted up to heaven, to his father:
- §26 "Include me—do not show me any mercy!" Then the Storm-God killed the serpe[nt] and his (own) son. And now this one, the Storm-God [. . .]
- §27 Thus says Kella, [the "anointed priest" of the Storm-God of Nerik: . . .] when the gods [. . .]
- (gap of about 40 lines insert §§27a–27c')
- §27a [. . .] and to him to ea[t . . .] back to Ner[ik] . . .] he releases.
- §27b [. . .] (the god) Zašhapuna [. . .] (s)he [. . .]ed, and the Storm-God of Nerik [and . . .] went. And Zali[yanu . . .] gave back [. . .]
- §27c [. . .] then he trans[ported] . . . tjo' Ne[rik] . . .
- §28 [Then f]or the "anointed priest" they made the [fore]most gods the [humb]lest, and the [hum]blest they made the foremost gods.
- §29 The cultic tax of Zali[ya]nu is great. Zašhapuna the wife of Zali[ya]nu is greater than the Storm-God of Nerik.
- §30 The gods speak as follows to the "anointed priest" Tahpurili: "When we go to the Storm-God of Nerik, where shall we sit?"
- §31 The "anointed priest" Tahpurili speaks as follows: "When you sit on a diorite stool, and when the "anointed priests" cast the lot, then the "anointed priest" who holds (the image of) Zaliyanu—a diorite stool shall be set above the spring, and he shall be seated there."
- §32 "All the gods will arrive, and they will cast the lot. Of all the gods (of the town of) Kastama, Zašhapuna will be the greatest.
- §33 "Because she is the wife of Zali[ya]nu, (and) Tazzuwašši is his concubine, these three persons will remain in (the town of) Tanipiya."
- §34 And thereafter in Tanipiya a field will be handed over from the royal (property)—
- §35 Six *kapunu*-measures of field, one *kapunu*-measure of garden, a house together with a threshing-floor, three buildings for the household personnel—it is (recorded) [on] a tablet. I am respectful of the m[at]te[r], and I have spoken these things (truly).
- §36 One tablet, complete, of the word of Kella, the "anointed priest."
- (colophon)
- Pihaziti, [the scribe,] wrote it under the supervision of Walwaziti, the chief scribe.

God to avenge himself upon his enemy, although one might have supposed that his divine assistant, Inara, could have tied up the serpent and his brood. An essential factor in the second version is the participation of a human female as mother, by the Storm-God, of a son who is seemingly entirely human in nature. The joint effort of human and deity is the common element in the two versions of a myth that otherwise differ greatly in plot. A similar relationship of human and divine is found in the Myth of the Vanishing God (CTH 322–27) where ritual performances on the part of the divine healer Kamrusepa and of a mortal ritual practitioner are both required to placate the absent deity. Indeed, within this latter text, it is not clear exactly where the activities of the goddess leave off and those of the human begin.

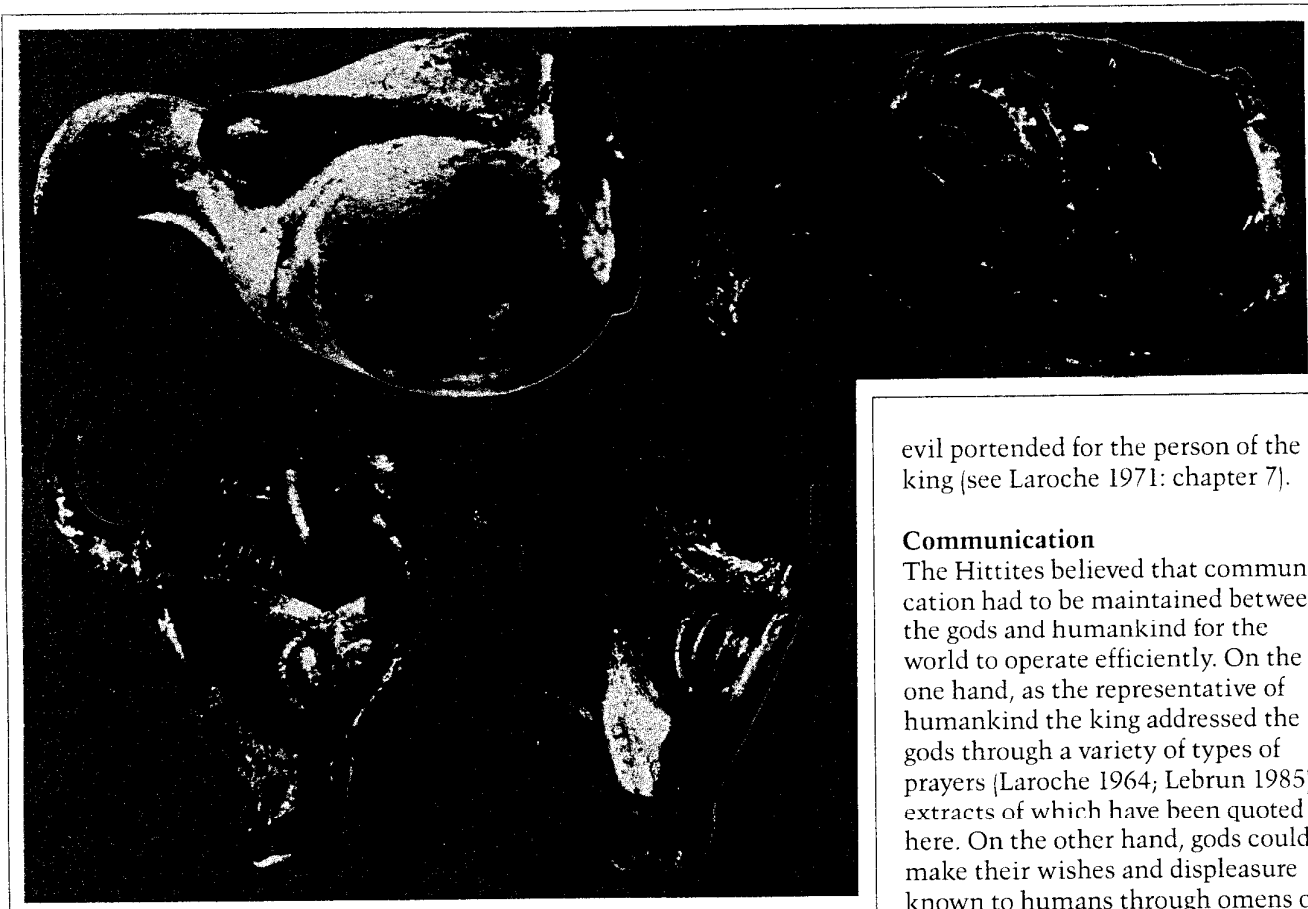
In CTH 321, both Hupašiya and the mortal offspring of the Storm-God come to grief. Although the direct causes of their destruction are different—the jealousy of Inara in the first instance and the logic of Anatolian family structure in the second—both mortal protagonists are punished for a too intimate relationship with the deities whom they aid, an intimacy symbolized by sexual intercourse. While Hupašiya clearly demonstrates hubris by his demand for the favors of Inara, and the anonymous son of the Storm-God is a blameless tragic figure trapped by his social obligations, both have nonetheless crossed the line separating mortals from deities.

The Myth of Illuyanka gives expression to an important facet of the Hittites' conception of the universe. The activity of everyone contributes to the proper functioning of the cosmos, but each individual must remain in his or her proper place. As the god is to the mortal, so in a sense is the king to the subject.

For a complete edition of the text, accompanied by philological notes, see my previous article (1982). This sidebar is adapted from that article.

—Gary Beckman

Clay vessels in the shape of animals were often used for ceremonial purposes. These bull-shaped rhytons and eagle-shaped rhytons were found at the site of the karum at Kaneš. Photos courtesy of Tahsin Özgüç.



ever, was the restoration of a person to his or her proper functioning within a particular sphere of life. The cause of the impairment might be divine anger, but the problem might also be due to *papratar*, a kind of pollution. Whether this pollution was the result of a person's own misdeeds or had been sent by an enemy through black magic, it had to be removed and rendered harmless. This was often accomplished by means of analogic magic. A typical incantation reads:

As a ram mounts a ewe and she becomes pregnant, so let this

city and house become a ram, and let it mount the dark earth in the steppe! And let the dark earth become pregnant with the blood, impurity and sin!⁷

It is interesting to note that most of the analogies used in such magic were drawn from the daily experience of the Hittite peasant.

A wide range of difficulties could be countered by a ritual. There were ceremonies designed to alleviate such problems as family strife, sexual impotence, and insomnia, and we also know that rituals were performed to ward off plague, military defeat, or

evil portended for the person of the king (see Laroche 1971: chapter 7).

Communication

The Hittites believed that communication had to be maintained between the gods and humankind for the world to operate efficiently. On the one hand, as the representative of humankind the king addressed the gods through a variety of types of prayers (Laroche 1964; Lebrun 1985), extracts of which have been quoted here. On the other hand, gods could make their wishes and displeasure known to humans through omens or oracles. Omens were messages from gods to humans, most frequently encountered through dreams (Oppenheim 1956: 254–55). Much more important were the oracles, procedures through which humans solicited information from the gods. Countless records of augury, extispicy (divination through the reading of animal entrails), and a curious type of lot oracle (Kammenhuber 1976) have been preserved in the archives. These divination techniques were often used as checks on one another.

Pleas made by Muršili II in an effort to determine the cause of the plague afflicting Hatti underline the need for communication

between gods and humans:

Or if people are dying for some other reason, let me see it in a dream, or let it be established through an oracle, or let a prophet speak it! Or in regard to whatever I communicate (as a possible cause of the epidemic) to all the priests, let them investigate it through incubation!¹⁸

Conclusion

In this short presentation I have tried to show that the religious conceptions of the Hittites were congruent with their social system and ecological situation. Like the king and other members of the ruling class, the gods stood far above the ordinary Hittite, dispensing favors or punishments according to their pleasure. At the same time, all inhabitants of the Hittite world were mutually dependent, and the labors of the peasant agriculturalist and pastoralist were the basis upon which all else — human and divine — rested.

Notes

¹ KUB 24.2 rev. 12'–16' (see glossary listing for KUB).

² KUB 21.27 i 3–6.

³ KUB 24.3 ii 4'–17'.

⁴ KUB 29.1 i 17–19.

⁵ KUB 38.1 iv 1–7.

⁶ KUB 25.6 iv 5–24.

⁷ KUB 41.8 iv 29–32.

⁸ KUB 14.8 rev. 41–44, as restored from duplicates.

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