Motivations for Hittite Mythological Texts

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For purposes of the following discussion I subsume under the notion 'myth' narratives about deities and/or humans in a past that lies beyond direct knowledge and describes extraordinary events.[1] One may choose to limit 'myth' to those stories that involve deities,[2] and classify those with exclusively human actors as 'legends' or the like. However, the often fragmentary nature of our evidence and the undeniable belief of the Hittites themselves in the routine intervention of deities in human affairs make such a distinction hard to maintain.[3] I will return briefly to the problem of definition and classification in my conclusion. Translations of most of the texts mentioned here are available in Italian in F. Pecchioli Daddi and A. Polvani's *La mitologia ittita* and in English in Harry A. Hoffner Jr's *Hittite Myths* (the latter being more inclusive).[4] These two works also discuss with varying degrees of detail the nature of the respective compositions — discussions that should be compared with others cited below.

Our sources for Hittite myth are limited to the archives of the royal/imperial bureaucracy, whose records include royal annals, treaties, protocols (instructions

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[1] Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*.

[2] For example, Beckman, 'Mythologie'.

[3] For a thoughtful discussion of this problem apropos of one Hittite text, see Gilan, 'How Many Princes Can the Land Bear?'.

[4] *La mitologia ittita*, ed. by Pecchioli Daddi and Polvani; *Hittite Myths*, trans. by Hoffner.

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regulating the behaviour of state officials), the state cult, rituals, and scholastic texts for scribal instruction. For us, then, Hittite myth not only exists exclusively in written form, but also has been selectively filtered in that the extant texts must have had some relevance for the governing bureaucracy. Any possible relationship of mythical narratives to an oral tradition among the 'common people' can only be surmised. As defined, Hittite mythological texts fall into three distinct categories according to their role or function in state affairs.

The first group consists of myths ascribed to the Hattians, the autochthonous pre-Indo-European inhabitants of Central Anatolia. The core of the content of these Hattic myths undoubtedly is native Anatolian, but there likely has been some admixture of inherited Indo-European elements in the form in which they are presented to us in the Hittite texts. These Hattic myths form an integral part of state religious festivals (regularly performed rituals to maintain the integrity and prosperity of society, or of rituals performed to resolve crises). As rightly formulated by Beckman: 'The primordial event memorialized in the text served as a paradigm for the resolution of a parallel contemporary problem'.[5]

We have one such myth whose status as part of a fixed state ritual is assured: the 'Myth of Illuyanka'.[6] This myth describes the battle of the Storm-god (chief deity in the Hattic-Hittite pantheon) with an eel-snake dwelling in a watery pit.[7] The latter initially wins, but the Storm-god prevails with the aid of a human who perishes due to his intimate relationship with the deity.

This myth is part of the *furulli* festival of Nerik, a spring festival performed to assure and celebrate the annual renewal of the natural world. See the discussion by Haas and the text opening:[8] *utne-wa māu šešdu nu-wa utnē paḫšanuwan ēšdu nu mān māi šešzi nu* EZEN *purulliya iyanzi*, '"Let the land grow and prosper! Let the land be protected!" In order that (it) grow and prosper, they celebrate the *p.*-festival'.[9]

[5] Beckman, 'Mythologie', p. 565.

[6] On which see, in addition to the works cited above, Watkins, 'Le Dragon hittite Illuyankas'; Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, pp. 448–59; Katz, 'How to Be a Dragon in Indo-European'; and Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, pp. 97–103.

[7] Katz, 'How to Be a Dragon in Indo-European', p. 324 n. 23.

[8] *Keilschriftexte aus Boghazköi*, III, text 7, col. 1, ll. 5–8.

[9] My translation follows that of *La mitologia ittita*, ed. by Pecchioli Daddi and Polvani, p. 50, after Stefanini against that of Hoffner and others. The more usual translation 'If/when (it) grows and prospers, they celebrate the *p.*-festival' makes no sense in context, since the fixed annual celebration does not depend on the prosperity of the land, but according to the Hittite belief rather the opposite. Hittite does not have a regular construction for 'final clauses', but *mān* may be read here as the particle used to express desire. Thus more literally: 'Would that (it) grow and prosper, (for that) they perform the *p.*-festival'.

The most famous of the Hattic myths is that of the 'disappearing god',[10] which follows a set plot line: a deity retreats in anger, refusing to perform his or her vital functions, leading to drastic dysfunction in the cosmos (or a part thereof) and the need to induce the deity to return and resume his or her functions. Recitation of the myth (adapted to the case of the specific deity) is accompanied by both divine and human propitiatory rituals and by verbal evocation of the deity. The Hittite term for this ritual type is *mūgawar*, the verbal noun of *mūgā(i)-* 'to induce to action'.[11] The best-known version of the myth is for Telipinu (Hattic for 'great son', that is, of the Storm-god), whose absence leads to widespread famine and sterility, but we have fragments of multiple versions, and there is yet no proven association with a fixed state festival.[12]

A third Hattic myth known as 'When the Moon Fell from the Sky' is to be performed 'when the Storm-god thunders frightfully'.[13] The very fragmentary documentation of this myth leaves its connection with ritual use not fully clear. As *per* Beckman, textual variations in the Hattic myths suggest that they are based on an oral tradition, but it is doubtful that they show any metrical structure.[14]

The second major group of Hittite myths consists of those borrowed (or more accurately adapted) from various Near Eastern sources. I follow Beckman in regarding these as essentially belletristic literature used for the instruction of scribes and perhaps for the entertainment of the Hittite court.[15] These texts may to some extent be subcategorized by source, but this classification must be regarded as provisional for many of the compositions.

Some of the myths are clearly Mesopotamian in origin. The famous story of Gilgamesh is attested in the Hittite archives in both an Akkadian version and a Hittite version based on a Hurrian intermediary. It is clear from the content of the latter despite its fragmentary condition that it is a free adaptation, not a translation. We also find (unfortunately even more fragmentary) manuscripts of the Atrahasīs (which includes a flood narrative) and the story of Gurparanzah (a tale

[10] Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, pp. 103–15.

[11] Thus with Laroche, *La Prière hittite*, pp. 20–24, against all others.

[12] With due respect to Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, p. 104.

[13] Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, pp. 120–22.

[14] Beckman, 'Mythologie', p. 565. For a different view on the latter point see Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, pp. 102 and 105, following deVries.

[15] Beckman, 'Mythologie', p. 565.

of the city of Akkad, the Tigris, and the eponymous hero). Both of these are in Akkadian with a Hittite translation.

Sometimes conventionally labelled 'Canaanite' (in any case Syro-Palestinian) are the story of Elkunirša and Ašertu (relating sexual intrigues about the god El and his wife) and the Tale of Appu (about a wealthy but initially childless man, who after prayer to the Sun-god receives two sons whom he names 'Good' and 'Bad').

Most extensive among the myths adapted by the Hittites are those based on Hurrian precursors. It must be emphasized, however, that the Hurrians are assured only to be the immediate source of transmission to the Hittites. The ultimate origins of the various myths are uncertain and subject to vigorous debate. The largest set of such texts is the 'Kumarbi Cycle', which tells of a multi-generational divine struggle for the kingship of heaven. Its many shared features with Hesiod's theogony surely reflect a Near Eastern, not Indo-European source. These texts are labelled 'songs' in their Hittite versions and almost certainly are in verse.[16]

The Hurro-Hittite 'Song of Release' is an etiological story of the destruction of Ebla, a powerful city state of Syria in the third-second millennia that was destroyed *c.* the sixteenth century BC.[17] It is not yet clear whether this composition is also in verse. Also among the Hurro-Hittite myths belongs the story of Kešši, the hunter.

The third set of myths represents myth in the guise of prehistory. This type is based on the widespread Hittite practice of justifying and motivating current political policy based on past events. Such historical narratives are found in preambles to treaties, both parietal and non-parietal, in the so-called 'apology' of Hattusili III, in the text of Mursili II on the '*tawananna* affair', and others.[18] A desire in some instances to relate the relevant facts 'from the beginning' led beyond the two to three generations available to direct memory and hence a resorting to what we from our perspective would regard as myth.

The clearest example of this sort is the 'Zalpa Narrative'.[19] The extant text first presents a story of prodigious multiple births, exposure of infant boys in baskets

[16] See McNeill, 'The Metre of the Hittite Epic'; Durnford, 'Some Evidence for Syntactic Stress in Hittite'; and Melchert, 'Poetic Meter and Phrasal Stress in Hittite'.

[17] On the interpretation of this text (the *editio princeps* is that of Neu, *Das hurritische Epos der Freilassung*), see now Wilhelm, 'Das hurritisch-hethitische "Lied der Freilassung"', and Bachvarova, 'Relations between God and Man', with references.

[18] For translations of the passages in treaties, see *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, trans. by Beckman.

[19] Translation in *Hittite Myths*, trans. by Hoffner, pp. 81–82.

on a river and their divine rescue, and brother-sister incest. After a significant lacuna we find a few lines referring to the Sun-god (including direct speech by him), followed directly by the beginning of a prosaic historical narrative involving the 'grandfather of the king'. There can be no doubt that the two parts of the text form a single composition. Interpretations diverge widely,[20] but what seems clear is that the text is an attempt to account for an historically attested hostility between Hattusha (the Hittite capital) and Zalpa, a city on Black Sea coast with which there existed some kind of complex (possibly ethnic) prehistorical relationship.

A second example is 'The Bull with the Crumpled Horn', an etiological story of the crossing of the Taurus Mountains.[21] There are surely further examples in texts describing early encounters with the Hurrians (aptly characterized by Laroche as 'récits légendaires')[22] and possibly in the so-called 'cannibal text'.[23] Also worth mentioning are the unassigned *historiolae* and mythologems collected by Haas.[24] As already noted by Haas, the line between 'myth' and 'history' is often blurred.[25] The Zalpa text suggests that the distinction may have been non-existent for Hittites.[26]

We are thus brought back face-to-face with the problem of how we are to define 'myth'. It should be obvious that the threefold classification I have just offered rests entirely on a modern viewpoint, as does the overall selection of compositions to be considered (the latter, I emphasize, generally follows others and

[20] See Watkins, 'The Third Donkey'; Gilan, 'How Many Princes Can the Land Bear?'; Holland and Zorman, *The Myth of Zalpa*; and Zorman, 'CTH 3', and their respective references to still other analyses.

[21] Otten, 'Aitiologische Erzählung von der Überquerung der Taurus'.

[22] Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites*, p. 4.

[23] Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, pp. 51–54. In an old Hittite text that purports to be a historical narrative we find the tantalizing lines (*Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi*, III, text 60, col. 2, ll. 1–5): 'Whatever man arr[ives] among them, they always eat him up. Whenever they see a fat man, they kill him and eat him up'. The preceding context is lacking, so we cannot know to whom 'they' refers, but later in the same text (*Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi*, III, text 60, col. 3, ll. 7–9) we find further: 'They seized the mother of Zuppa in Tinisipa. They killed her and ate her up'. See Amir Gilan's thoughtful discussion regarding the difficulty in defining this episode and the entire text as 'fiction' or 'non-fiction' (Gilan, 'Were There Cannibals in Syria?'). We may in this case be dealing with an intentional attempt to characterize a region and its inhabitants as 'the other' by attributing to them a shocking practice.

[24] Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, pp. 237–44.

[25] Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, p. 20.

[26] Compare Munn, *The Mother of the Gods*, pp. 302–10, on a similar blurring in Herodotus.

is not original with me). It is unlikely that the Hittites themselves perceived the same commonalities among the three types that we do — or at least that they regarded such features from the same perspective. As in the case of trying to classify Hittite 'literature', however, we unfortunately have very little basis for inferring the Hittites' own contextualization of this material. I forgo here any mere speculation in this regard.

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India and the Graphy o' My

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As the organizers of the original conference and editor of this volun attest, I approached the conference in great puzzlement, pesteri organizers for months trying to find out what the word 'mythog actually meant. My interpretation remains insecure, but insofar as I can tell cially from the conference brochure, at least for the conference and the quent volume there are three crucial parts to 'mythography'.

1. At some point in various cultures (the examples given in the conference were all Western European) the (or a) floating set of traditional stories gods and heroes gets *collected* and *written down*, and with these actio stories get a 'fixed' and canonical form. Though the term mytho*graph* references writing, at least as I understand the conference blurb, the *col* is just as important, as it assembles into a compendium stories that ma been originally independent and/or transmitted separately and for di purposes, and thereby creates a pseudo-unity.
2. The collection and writing are often done by a single person, or a few viduals, for antiquarian/secular/'patriotic' purposes. I know all those especially the last two, are problematic. But by 'secular' I roughly mea the collection was not made to serve religious ends (for example, collec priests for recitation at rituals), and by 'patriotic' I mean that the coll may have been made to celebrate, affirm, or even create an ethnic, cultu political identity.

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