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"A WISE AND DISCERNING MIND"
Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long

Edited by

Saul M. Olyan
Robert C. Culley

Brown Judaic Studies
Providence, Rhode Island

2000

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Chapter 2

Goddess Worship—Ancient and Modern

Gary Beckman
University of Michigan

Almost 3500 years ago a Hittite worshipper addressed a goddess:

> Whatever household is hated by Ištar,
> she sends those (her attendants) into that house in order to treat it.
> They do the housework with groaning and anguish.
> The young brides were at odds,
> and (so) one always pulls the other by the head,
> and they no longer weave cloth in harmony.
> The brothers have become enemies,
> and (so) they no longer plow the field by the acre;
> they have quarreled,
> and (so) grinding of grain no longer takes place.
> . . . . . .
> A man and his wife who love each other and carry their love
> to fulfillment:
> That has been decreed by you, Ištar.
> He who seduces a woman and carries the seduction to fulfillment:
> That has been decreed by you, Ištar.
> . . . . . .
> But if a woman is hated by her husband,
> then you, Ištar, have caused her to be hated.

Special abbreviations employed in this essay are:

IBoT — Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzelerinde Bulunan Boğazköy Tabletlerinden Seçme Metinler (Istanbul, 1944–88)

KBo — Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi (Berlin, 1916–)

KUB — Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi (Leipzig, Berlin, 1921–90)

> But if a man is even hated by his wife,
> then you, Ištar, have heaped up misery(?) for them.[1]

These lines exalt the powers of the deity to determine interpersonal relations among humans, to render them negative as well as positive. In contrast, a neo-pagan ritual from the second half of the past century has only nice things to say about the Goddess (singular and capitalized), who is thought by her adherents to be the continuation of all female divinities recognized by past cultures of Europe and western Asia:

> The presence of the noble Goddess extends everywhere.
> Throughout the many strange, magical,
> And beautiful worlds.
> To all places of wilderness, enchantment, and freedom.
>
> The Lady is awesome.
> The Powers of death bow before Her.
>
> Our Goddess is a Lady of Joy.
> The winds are Her servants.
>
> Our Goddess is a Goddess of Love.
> At Her blessings and desire
> the sun brings forth life anew.
>
> The seas are the domains of our Serene Lady.
> The mysteries of the depths are Hers alone.
>
> The circle is sealed, and all herein
> Are totally and completely apart
> From the outside world,
> That we may glorify the Lady whom we adore.
> Blessed Be![2]

No ambivalent nature like that of the Hittite goddess is in evidence in the apostrophe to her successor. Did the ancient poet enjoy a closer acquaintance with his subject than the author of the modern text, or has the nature of female divinity become milder over the course of millennia?

My attention has been drawn to the question of gods in female form in the course of work on a Hittite ritual addressed to a goddess of Mesopotamian origin, represented in the cuneiform text by the logogram (word-sign) *IŠTAR*.[3] Seeking to grasp her essence—moving "toward the image of Ištar"[4] as it were—I began to co
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herself could be described as "a s
paramount deity."[8]

[1] *KUB* 24.7 i 24–33, 38–40, 48–50. Translation by H. G. Güterbock, "A Hurro-Hittite Hymn to Ishtar," *JAOS* 103 (1984) 156–57. I have simplified the typography here by eliminating the brackets indicating restored portions, and have supplied the "misery" in the final line.

[2] E. Fitch, "Pagan Ritual for General Use," quoted in M. Adler, *Bringing Down the Moon*. Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1986) 470–71.

[3] See my "Babylonica Hethitica: The *'babilili*-Ritual' from Boğazköy," in *Recent*

Developments in Hittite Archaeology a
Jr., and K. A. Yener; Winona Lake, I

[4] *Homage* to the essay of Th. Jac
(1961) 189–213.

[5] This neologism is in common u

[6] *Rebirth of the Goddess* (New Yor

[7] So characterized by M. W. Conl
Goddess: Exploring the Contours c
Academy (ed. D. C. Stanton and A. J.
1995) 206.

[8] I have borrowed this concise s
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Debate (ed. L. W. Hurtado; Atlanta:

Ištar"[4] as it were—I began to collect information about goddesses in Hittite religion and in other belief systems of the ancient Near East, and to peruse anthropological and religio-historical discussions of goddess worship.

Inevitably, I was confronted by the centrality of the Goddess within the twentieth century's so-called "neo-pagan revival." When in early 1999 I ran a search for the keyword "goddess" on the Amazon.com bookstore web page, I got 122 "hits," 110 of which appeared from their titles to deal with present-day beliefs about, and reverence for, a deity in female form. By now I have done a fair amount of reading in literature of this sort, tracking down many relevant essays in feminist and New Age periodicals. A fair summary of modern Goddess belief is given by *thealogian*[5] Carol Christ:

> . . . the Goddess is the power of intelligent embodied love that is the ground of all being. The earth is the body of the Goddess. All beings are interdependent in the web of life. Nature is intelligent, alive and aware. As part of nature, human beings are relational, embodied, and interdependent. The basis of ethics is the feeling of deep connection to all people and all beings in the web of life. The symbols and rituals of Goddess religion bring these values to consciousness and help us build communities in which we can create a more just, peaceful, and harmonious world. . . .[6]

I find it difficult to object to the ethical viewpoint enunciated here.

However, as an historian, I have been struck by the apparent need of many authors of Goddess literature to buttress their newly-adopted faith with claims of its great antiquity and unbroken subterranean transmission, in the face of Christian persecution, to contemporary communities of belief. According to this "Goddess hypothesis," or "conviction,"[7] there existed early in the human experience "an original, uniform, peaceful, matriarchal/matrilineal society with the Goddess as deity." This Goddess herself could be described as "a single, ubiquitous, prehistoric and historic paramount deity."[8]

Developments in Hittite Archaeology and History (ed. H. G. Güterbock, H. A. Hoffner, Jr., and K. A. Yener; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

[4] *Homage* to the essay of Th. Jacobsen, "Toward the Image of Tammuz," *HR* 1 (1961) 189–213.

[5] This neologism is in common use among Goddess theorists and devotees.

[6] *Rebirth of the Goddess* (New York: Routledge, 1997) xv.

[7] So characterized by M. W. Conkey and R. E. Tringham, "Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology," in *Feminisms in the Academy* (ed. D. C. Stanton and A. J. Stewart; Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995) 206.

[8] I have borrowed this concise summary from J. B. Townsend, "The Goddess: Fact, Fallacy and Revitalization Movement," in *Goddesses in Religions and Modern Debate* (ed. L. W. Hurtado; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 181.

Thus there is a tendency within Goddess circles to view all historically attested female divinities as full or partial manifestations of a single figure—sometimes called the "Great Mother"[9]—and to see the tracks of this Goddess also in prehistoric artifacts thought to be religious in character. The desire for historical validation is clear, for example, in the words of Carol Christ: "It makes a great deal of difference to me to know that the Goddess has a history, that feminists in the twentieth century did not make her up out of whole cloth."[10]

Here I will review some of the evidence for the flourishing of a premodern Goddess cult, emphasizing material from my own area of expertise, the religion of the Hittites. Of course there is no doubt that countless cultures have conceived of innumerable deities in the form of the human female.[11] What is in question, rather, is the alleged widespread or even universal worship of a unitary, supreme, and unfailingly benevolent female creator and mother, a figure such as that addressed by the modern hymnist quoted earlier.

Here I must clarify my personal approach to historical scholarship: Despite the realization that I often fail to attain my ideal due to prejudice and societal conditioning, I nonetheless strive for objectivity. While postmodernists and radical feminists have indeed demonstrated that historical—as well as other—*meaning* is constructed by each person and each group,[12] this observation does not negate the autonomous existence of historical *facts* outside of particular discourses.[13] Cleopatra either dallied with Caesar and with Anthony, or she did not. King David either ruled in Jerusalem, or he did not. Our remote ancestors either universally honored the Great Mother, or they did not.

[9] This designation obviously goes back to an epithet of Cybele of the pre-Classical and Classical periods, on whom see now L. E. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999), but it owes its contemporary popularity to the work of E. Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955).

[10] *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 44.

[11] For a thoughtful discussion of the conceptual difficulties which arise when one attributes only a masculine gender to the divine, see T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

[12] The contentious issue of the degree of distortion inevitably introduced by historians in their reconstructions of the past is discussed at length by P. Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

[13] On the other hand, the recognition of particular facts as significant—as "historical facts"—is dependent upon the interests, needs, and biases of the individual historian. See E. H. Carr, "The Historian and His Facts," in *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961) 3–35.

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[15] *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 34–40.

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Einflusses . . .": antisemitische Forschu
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[17] E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mo*
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[18] Cf. D. H. French, "Archaeolog
gion und Kultur Kleinasiens: Festschrif
28. Februar 1976 (ed. S. Sahin et al.; I

Whether we today possess sufficient information to establish the facts concerning an individual person, event, or belief of the past is another matter. His or her preconceptions may make an observer loath to accept evidence which threatens a worldview, but this by no means eliminates that evidence. Witness the flowering in recent decades of women's history, whose practitioners have made use of material which was available all along, although ignored by writers working in the mainstream historical tradition, who privileged records created by, for, and about "Great Men."[14]

Thus, even if we inevitably fall short in our efforts at objectivity, it is highly inadvisable to follow Professor Christ in abandoning this way of thought in favor of what she calls "embodied thinking,"[15] that is, empathetic subjectivity checked, in theory, by the opinion of the community with which one identifies. If we should adopt this approach, the world of scholarship would fragment into a babble of incommensurate and mutually unintelligible discourses. And lest one argue that it doesn't really matter anyway, that the disputes of academics are so many meaningless skirmishes in Cloudcuckooland, we must remember that ideas do have consequences. German historical and religious scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century was subjected to the disastrous influence of *völkish* thought, which rejected objectivity and approached all questions from a standpoint of ostensible empathy with an imagined "racial community."[16] The disastrous consequences of this development are well known.

To return to my topic—advocates of the Goddess hypothesis see the deity's presence in some of the earliest recovered works of human craft: in Paleolithic cave paintings and in steatopygous figurines.[17] Of course, verification or falsification of social conditions or beliefs postulated for prehistory is practically an impossible task,[18] since written documents are by

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[14] See G. Lerner, "Why History Matters," in *Why History Matters* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997) 199–211.

[15] *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 34–40.

[16] See in general M. Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People* (New York: YIVO, 1946), and more to the point for the subject at hand, S. Heschel, "Deutsche Theologen für Hitler: Walter Grundmann und das Eisenacher Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben," in *"Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses . . .": antisemitische Forschung, Eliten und Karrieren im Nationalsozialismus* (ed. A. Hofmann; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999) 147–67.

[17] E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother-Goddess* (New York: Praeger, 1959) 13–22; G. R. Levy, *The Gate of Horn* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948) 56–63.

[18] Cf. D. H. French, "Archaeology, Prehistory and Religion," in *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasiens: Festschrift für Friedrich Karl Dörner zum 65. Geburtstag am 28. Februar 1976* (ed. S. Sahin et al.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978) 375–83.

definition lacking, and the interpretation of mute artifacts is fraught with arbitrariness and uncertainty. But let us try.

Everyone is familiar with the cave paintings of France, most of which depict animals, sometimes as the quarry of hunters. While this subject matter does not immediately point to the Goddess—or to any deity at all—Goddess theorists would have it that the very placement of the art in caverns is significant. In their view, the caves themselves should be interpreted as symbolic representations of the womb of the Goddess,[19] and the beasts as her offspring. To this argument I would reply, "Kann sein, muß aber nicht," or "T'ain't necessarily so." An alternative explanation for the location of the paintings can easily be adduced: In the time before settled life and therefore before architecture, for instance, humans could have been expected to seek shelter in readily available caves. It would only be natural for early people to place illustrations which they wished to preserve on the walls of such periodic habitations. Perhaps paintings were also done elsewhere—say on exterior rock outcroppings—but they could hardly have survived for us to view today.

The evidence of the statuettes is equally problematic. Most European and west Asian prehistoric small sculpture is actually either androgynous or theriomorphic,[20] and does not overwhelmingly portray a fecund female human as maintained by advocates of the Goddess hypothesis. Furthermore, do the images which *do* depict females represent humans or deities? If the latter, do all of the figurines portray a single divinity? Their function is also obscure. Were prehistoric female statuettes intended to stimulate fertility, or perhaps to aid human mothers in giving birth? In sum, evidence for a cult of the Goddess in the Paleolithic is not probative.

Regarding Neolithic Europe, enthusiasts of the Goddess generally embrace the reconstruction of developments put forward by archaeologist Marija Gimbutas.[21] A critic has summarized this interpretation as follows:

> Originally, society was matriarchal, matrilineal, matrilocal, egalitarian and peaceful. Women held the positions of power equal to, or greater than, [those] of men. The religion of this primal stage of culture was concerned with "*the* (Mother) Goddess." A time of destruction followed. Matriarchal (or at least matrilineal) society under the Mother Goddess was usurped by the invasion of more warlike, male-dominated, pastoral societies whose deity was male.[22] . . . Following that conquest by the pastoral, patriarchal, patrilineal societies, the God
> were subordinated to the rule

Matriarchy is fundamental
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[19] Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 50–53.

[20] Conkey and Tringham, "Archaeology and the Goddess," 215.

[21] Her ideas are well summarized in the posthumous *The Living Goddesses* (edited and supplemented by M. R. Dexter; Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999).

[22] This is a reference to the arrival of speakers of the Indo-European languages in Europe.

[23] J. B. Townsend, "The Godd
Gimbutas and 'New Age' Archaeol

[24] Excerpted in *Myth, Religion a*
(tr. R. Manheim; Princeton: Princet

[25] Available in Friedrich Engel
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[26] See R. Noll, *The Jung Cult: Or*
Press, 1997) 161–76.

[27] *Gyn-Ecology* (Boston: Beacon

[28] *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece:*
con Press, 1984).

[29] See J. F. Collier and M. Z. Rosa
Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Constr
H. Whitehead; Cambridge: Cambri
The Creation of Patriarchy (New York

patrilineal societies, the Goddess religion was suppressed and women were subordinated to the rule of men.[23]

Matriarchy is fundamental to Gimbutas's earthly Eden. The concept of a universal stage in human cultural evolution in which women exercised political power was first formulated in 1861 by the Swiss jurist and classicist Johann Jakob Bachofen,[24] primarily on the basis of an analysis of Greek mythological tales. Rejected or ignored by contemporary classical scholars, Bachofen's ideas on what he called "mother-right" (*das Mutterrecht*) were adopted by Friedrich Engels in his *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* of 1884,[25] and in this century they have been enthusiastically revived by followers of C. J. Jung.[26] Indeed, the standard—and greatly abridged—English translation of *Das Mutterrecht* was published in the Jungian Bollingen series with an introduction by Joseph Campbell. It was only in the late 1970s that feminist theorists including Mary Daly[27] and Charlene Spretnak[28] began to employ the concept of primitive matriarchy to support their (re)construction of a "Goddess religion."

In the absence of textual evidence from the Neolithic, we must turn to ethnological parallels to test the plausibility of a primeval matriarchy. It is surely telling that anthropologists have failed to identify a single living society—no matter how primitive its economic structure—in which women are dominant over men.[29] Thus we must reject the place of matriarchy as an *inevitable* phase of human social development. This conclusion poses no particular difficulties for Jungians, since they hold that "mother-right" is nonetheless valid as a stage of youthful psychological development. But considerable damage has obviously been sustained by Engels's theory of early history as a progression of stages including matriarchy. More importantly, an important prop of the Goddess hypothesis which we are considering has been knocked out.

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[23] J. B. Townsend, "The Goddess" 180–81. See also L. Meskel, "Goddesses, Gimbutas and 'New Age' Archaeology," *Antiquity* 69 (1995) 74–86.

[24] Excerpted in *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen* (tr. R. Manheim; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967) 69–207.

[25] Available in Friedrich Engels, *Studienausgabe* 3 (ed. H. Mehringer and G. Mergner; Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowolt, 1973) 15–146.

[26] See R. Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (New York: Free Press, 1997) 161–76.

[27] *Gyn-Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 107–12.

[28] *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

[29] See J. F. Collier and M. Z. Rosaldo, "Politics and Gender in Simple Societies," in *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (ed. S. B. Ortner and H. Whitehead; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981) 275–329, and cf. G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) 15–35, esp. 31.

The argument for this theory is also marred by the selective use of evidence. Contrary to Gimbutas's claims, fortifications and other indications of warfare predating the penetration by the Indo-Europeans have in fact been recovered archaeologically in central and western Europe. Some burials from this region do present the variation in wealth usually associated with social hierarchy. And what is known from later texts about the goddesses of early Europe does not support the idea of a single, all-powerful goddess. Rather, we find a plethora of female deities, each with her own character and sphere of influence.[30]

The earliest textual documentation for religious belief and practice—and indeed for anything at all—was produced in the ancient Near East, beginning near the close of the fourth millennium in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. The religion of early Sumer, as evidenced primarily in lists of deities and registers of temple offerings, honored a great many goddesses. The most prominent female divinity was Ninḫursag,[31] whom we may describe as a Mother-goddess. Ninḫursag, however, did not subsume or even dominate the other Sumerian goddesses. Rather, each of these figures was responsible for a particular aspect of the cosmos—for example, overseeing the brewing of beer or looking out for the fortunes of a single city. Inanna of Uruk, who was named Ištar by Semitic speakers, was a particularly intriguing figure. According to the Sumerologist Thorkild Jacobsen,[32] Inanna was originally the spirit of the communal storehouse, but she soon came to embody human desires of all sorts, cupidity as well as avarice. The Hittite hymn with which I began invokes her as Ištar and celebrates her control of interpersonal relations among humans.

In a curious development, Ištar expands her sphere of influence over time, and by the late second millennium she has absorbed most other Mesopotamian goddesses.[33] The number of gods also falls, but not so radically. Why this occurred is not clear to me. But I must stress that a single Goddess was never paramount in the religions of the ancient Near East.

I come now to the area which I know best, the Hittite religion of second-millennium Anatolia. The numerous texts from the Hittite capital of Ḫattuša (the modern Turkish village of Boğazkale) allow us to establish many facts about Hittite society, including the position of women within it. Although they lived under patriarchal norms and were thereby disadvantaged in many spheres, women played an important role in religious

[30] H. E. Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess* (London: Routledge, 1998) 182–90.

[31] Th. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976) 104–10.

[32] Ibid., 135–43.

[33] On Ištar among the Hittites, see my essay, "Ištar of Nineveh Reconsidered," *JCS* 50 (1998) 1–10.

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women were normally present
musicians, priestesses such as
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which they participated.[35] It is
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From earliest times the role
of great importance in Hittite
the king stood at the apex of h
chief priest of the state gods and
blessing of the monarch reads:

> May the Tabarna,[37] the king, be
> Storm-god alone. Heaven, eartl
> alone. He has made the Labarna
> him the entire Land of Ḫatti. Th
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Although she is not expressly
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[34] See my "From Cradle to Gr
Magic," *Journal of Ancient Civilizatio*

[35] On these functionaries see S. R
(Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1975) 189–

[36] I discuss this complex of ideas
tion in Hittite Anatolia," in *Civilizat*
New York: Scribners, 1995) 1.529–4

[37] *Tabarna*, or *Labarna*, is a title of

[38] *HBoT* 1.30.

[39] An excellent photograph of
Universum der Kunst (Munich: C. H

affairs.[34] They were not denied access to temples in Ḫatti, and female practitioners were active in many ceremonies of the state cult. While these women were normally present in subordinate roles, such as singers and musicians, priestesses such as the "Mother of God" (AMA.DINGIR-*LIM*) and "Lady/Goddess" (NIN.DINGIR) seem to have directed the rites in which they participated.[35] It is my impression that the prominence of female officiants in official worship increased over time.

From earliest times the role of one particular woman—the queen—was of great importance in Hittite cult. According to Hittite royal ideology,[36] the king stood at the apex of human society by virtue of his position as chief priest of the state gods and as administrator of Ḫatti on their behalf. A blessing of the monarch reads:

> May the Tabarna,[37] the king, be dear to the gods! The land belongs to the Storm-god alone. Heaven, earth, and the people belong to the Storm-god alone. He has made the Labarna, the king, his administrator, and has given him the entire Land of Ḫatti. The Labarna shall continue to administer the entire land with his hand. May the Storm-god destroy whoever should approach the person of the Labarna, [the king], and the borders of Ḫatti![38]

Although she is not expressly mentioned in this benediction, it is clear from ritual texts that the queen joined her male counterpart at the focal point of Hittite worship already in earliest times. This joint responsibility for the cult is nicely illustrated by the rock relief at Firaktin near Kayseri in south-central Turkey in which Queen Puduḫepa worships the Sun-goddess while her husband Ḫattušili III serves the Storm-god.[39]

But what can we say about the personal religious beliefs of the ordinary Hittite? Of course, the records from the royal archives are far more informative about the state cult than concerning popular beliefs and practices, but an important window into this latter area is provided by the compositions which Hittitologists call "rituals." Such texts frequently begin with the identification of an "author" and the statement of the difficulty which the procedure is intended to resolve. For example, "Thus says Uḫḫamuwa, man of the Land of Arzawa: When there is mass death in the land—if some

[34] See my "From Cradle to Grave: Women's Role in Hittite Medicine and Magic," *Journal of Ancient Civilizations* 8 (1993) 25–39.

[35] On these functionaries see S. R. Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1975) 189–92.

[36] I discuss this complex of ideas in my "Royal Ideology and State Administration in Hittite Anatolia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. J. Sasson et al.; New York: Scribners, 1995) 1.529–43.

[37] *Tabarna,* or *Labarna,* is a title of the king.

[38] *IBoT* 1.30.

[39] An excellent photograph of this relief is given by K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter,* Universum der Kunst (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1976) 176–77, Abb. 198.

god of the enemy has brought it about, then I do as follows."[40] This particular rite would have been performed on behalf of a community, but many others focused on an individual. These included *rites de passage* for birth, adolescence, and death. For instance, the Hittite tablet collections have yielded more than a dozen birth rituals,[41] and the contents of several of these are mutually incompatible. I interpret this situation as follows: Hittite royal bureaucrats set about collecting the totality of information available within the central Hittite realm concerning various problems. All of this knowledge was filed in the archives of the capital for immediate use should a member of the royal family or court be confronted by any of these crises. These documents, then, afford us just a glimpse into popular religion in Late Bronze Age Anatolia.

Now, in connection with our consideration of the position of women in Ḫatti, it is striking how many of the practitioners in Hittite ritual texts are female. Indeed, of the 71 individuals attested by name as authors of rituals in E. Laroche's *Catalogue des textes hittites*,[42] 38, or more than 50%, are women. The most common designation borne by these magicians is "Old Woman," a title which links them to the realm of birth and practical obstetrics—compare the French *sage femme*. Indeed, I have shown elsewhere that midwifery is the original locus from which there expanded the magical competence of Hittite women.[43] In sum, we may judge that in the realm of religious practice, the authority of women was approximately equal to that of men.

And so we come to the role of goddesses in Hittite religion. This is a daunting problem, since the size of the Hittite pantheon is truly overwhelming. Indeed, the ancients themselves spoke of the "Thousand Gods of Ḫatti."[44] This multiplicity arose from the Hittites' practice of taking over the worship of the deities of territories which they added to their realm, rather than simply ignoring them or perhaps identifying them with their own traditional gods—as the Romans were later to treat the Olympians. A preliminary census of the Hittite pantheon reveals that more than one-third of the deities whose gender can be ascertained are female.[45] This anal-

[40] *KUB* 9.31 ii 1–3.

[41] These were the subject of my dissertation, published as *Hittite Birth Rituals* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983).

[42] Paris: Klincksieck, 1971.

[43] *Hittite Birth Rituals*, 232–35.

[44] See now Cem Karasu, "Why Did the Hittites Have a Thousand Deities?" in *Hittite Studies in Honor of Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (ed. R. Beal, G. Beckman, and G. McMahon; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

[45] The raw material has been collected by B. H. L. van Gessel, *Onomasticon of the Hittite Pantheon* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998).

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[46] *Hittite Birth Rituals*, 238–48.

[47] J. Klinger, *Untersuchungen zur*
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[48] D. Prechel, *Die Göttin Išḫara* (M

[49] V. Haas, *Geschichte der hethitisc*

[50] *KBo* 1.1 rev. 35.

[51] A comprehensive recent study
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in *Natural Phenomena: Their Meanin*
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Wetenschappen, 1992) 83–148.

[52] V. Haas, *Der Kult von Nerik* (R

[53] For excellent photographs, se

ysis must be refined in the future, however, to determine whether there are differences in the distribution of sex among the groups of divinities contributed by the various ethnic groups making up the population of Ḫatti, and to track changes in the relative prestige enjoyed by gods and goddesses over the 500-year course of Hittite history.

Prominent among the goddesses were grandmother Ḫannaḫanna, whose intervention is crucial in restoring the equilibrium of the universe in many Anatolian myths, as well as a number of other Mother-goddesses.[46] The Fate-deities and those responsible for birth were also female. In light of what we have seen earlier about the affinity of Hittite women for magic, it should come as no surprise that goddesses such as Kamrušepa[47] and Išḫara[48] are in charge of incantations and oaths on the divine level. Finally, the closing centuries of the Hittite Empire witnessed the steady increase in importance of Ištar-figures, imported from—or at least inspired by—the Mesopotamian and Syrian pantheons. Once more we encounter not a single Goddess but numerous female deities with special duties and competencies.

At the very head of the Hittite gods stood a chthonic and solar deity called the Sun-goddess of (the city of) Arinna,[49] who was adopted by the Hittites from their Hattic predecessors, and who is said to "direct the kingship and queenship"[50] of Ḫatti. Her partner was the Storm-god of Ḫatti (or of the Heavens),[51] who developed from the common Indo-European god of the bright sky. We have already seen his relationship to the Hittite monarch. Together with their son, the Storm-god of (the city of) Nerik,[52] these divinities constituted a sort of trinity on behalf of whom the mortal royal family governed Ḫatti. This imperial ideology takes concrete form in the sanctuary of Yazılıkaya, situated just outside Ḫattuša.[53] Here two converging processions of deities have been carved onto the opposing walls of an impressive rock outcropping—approximately 30 gods on the left and around 20 goddesses on the right. At the head of the open-air chamber the

[46] *Hittite Birth Rituals*, 238–48.

[47] J. Klinger, *Untersuchungen zur Rekonstruktion der hattischen Kultschicht* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996) 155–59.

[48] D. Prechel, *Die Göttin Išḫara* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996) 91–97.

[49] V. Haas, *Geschichte der hethitischen Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994) 423–26.

[50] *KBo* 1.1 rev. 35.

[51] A comprehensive recent study of this deity is P. H. J. Houwink ten Cate, "The Hittite Storm God: His Role and His Rule according to Hittite Cuneiform Sources," in *Natural Phenomena: Their Meaning, Depiction and Description in the Ancient Near East* (ed. D. J. W. Meijer; Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1992) 83–148.

[52] V. Haas, *Der Kult von Nerik* (Rome: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1970) 93–112.

[53] For excellent photographs, see K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter*, 203ff., Abb. 23–41.

columns meet in the persons of the imperial triad. Although far fewer than 1000 gods are depicted at Yazılıkaya, the monument nevertheless constitutes a clear statement of the "sexual politics" of Hittite religion: Male and female, god and goddess, are of symmetrical and equal importance for the proper functioning of the cosmos.

It is interesting to see that the patriarchal norms characteristic of the economy and society of the Hittites are absent from their religious life, and indeed from both the practical (cultic) and ideal (theological) levels. Feminist anthropologist Sherry Ortner has shown how useful it can be to think of a society's relative assignment of prestige by gender as hegemonic rather than absolute. This ordering, she writes, is "culturally dominant and relatively deeply embedded but nonetheless historically emergent, politically constructed, and nontotalistic." Furthermore, "every society/culture has some axes of male prestige and some of female, some of gender equality, and some (sometimes many) axes of prestige which have nothing to do with gender at all."[54]

I would judge that religious ideology was an aspect of Hittite life resistant to the patriarchal hegemony of the culture. It is easy to see how this might be so, given the anthropomorphism and polytheism of Hittite religion. Since the service which humans were thought to owe their divine masters was conceived of on analogy to that offered to mortal rulers, various aspects of worship might call for the particular qualities and talents—biologically determined or culturally defined—of both men and women. But the Hittite gods were not in fact simply human beings endowed with greater powers and immortality. As representatives of natural forces or of societal functions, deities could not be ordered hierarchically in relationship to one another in the manner of men and women within society. A Hittite might feel himself to be superior to his wife, and even receive social reinforcement in that judgement, but who could say that the fertility of the earth as embodied by the Sun-goddess of Arinna was any less crucial to all life than the fructifying rains of the Storm-god?

Having examined a variety of ancient evidence, including Hittite records, in some detail, we have noted scant support for the alleged historical underpinnings of the Goddess hypothesis. The pantheons of the documented societies of the ancient Near East featured not a single, paramount, and benevolent Goddess, but multiplicities of female figures. Each goddess had her own powers and duties and—as is clear from the Hittite hymn excerpted at the outset—could wreak havoc as well as distribute boons among humans.

[54] "Gender Hegemonies," in *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1996) 146–47.

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[55] M. J. Weaver, "Who is the Go
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[56] See J. K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Eg*
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Therefore the thealogians of the Goddess movement are not revivalists but inventors of a new tradition. But does this reduce the value of a faith which clearly fills a spiritual need for many contemporary women as well as for a considerable number of men? Not in the opinion of feminist writer Mary Jo Weaver, who recognizes that the Goddess movement rests upon a myth rather than on verifiable historical evidence. Nonetheless, she points out that

> utopias need not have connections to a real past in order to provide hope for a real future. . . . Goddess feminists use their rituals as moments of celebration, as a means of connection with the natural world, and as energy centers whence they emerge to seek the transformation of the world. Whoever she is, therefore, the Goddess appears to emerge out of a lost past with an invitation to criticize the present and to create a new future.[55]

While my scholarly inquiries are directed toward the recovery of the historical realities of the religions of the ancient Near East, the questionable historicity of the foundational myth of modern Goddess religion ought not to trouble its adherents. Nor does it seem to me particularly relevant to those investigating Goddess worship as a living faith. The truth of myth is not subject to empirical verification. On this level, argument about whether the Goddess once reigned supreme is comparable to the seemingly endless and ultimately misguided efforts to demonstrate the historical veracity of the Exodus tradition and other narratives of the Hebrew Bible.[56]

[55] M. J. Weaver, "Who is the Goddess and Where Does She Get Us?" *JFSR* 5 (1989) 64.

[56] See J. K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).