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

Edited by
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for the fleshpots of Egypt. And of the Book of Miriam? I must add: it falls backwards through Miriam is an invention of Angel, Miriam in the genre of Targum as a hybrid strategy, heterarchically midrashic versions midrashic versions chronology. Midrash has historical fact to be described, neither is it a fact that can be definitively interpreted, temporal, emergent.

A real an interesting contrast: The female-centered midrashists. In creating her mosaic of Miriam as the patriarchal culture of triumphal at the level of the Other. As such it depicts identifications and Self/Other to come through the level of the ed, and as such she has sung a

Chapter 2

Goddess Worship—Ancient and Modern

Gary Beckman
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Almost 3500 years ago a Hittite worshipper addressed a goddess:

- Whatever household is hated by Istar,
  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, Istar.
He who seduces a woman and carries the seduction to fulfillment:
- That has been decreed by you, Istar.

But if a woman is hated by her husband,
then you, Istar, have caused her to be hated.

Special abbreviations employed in this essay are:

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

KBo — Keilschrifttexte aus Bogazkői (Berlin, 1916–)

KUB — Keilschrifturkunden aus Bogazkői (Leipzig, Berlin, 1921–90)
But if a man is even hated by his wife,
then you, Istar, 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 (wordsign) İSTAR.3 Seeking to grasp her essence—moving “toward the image of Istar”4 as it were—I began to consider religion and in other belief systems anthropological and religio-historical.

Inevitably, I was confronted with a so-called “hits,” 110 with present-day beliefs about, by now I have done a fair amount of many relevant essay fair summary of modern God

Christ:

... the Goddess is the power of all being. The earth is the body of the Goddess in the web of life. Nature is the Goddess, human beings are related to this Goddess in the web of life. The symbols of values are consciousness and he.

I find it difficult to object to the historical truth.

However, as an historian, I find many authors of Goddess literature with claims of its great antiquity in the face of Christian persecution. According to this “Goddess” existed early in the human experience, and herself could be described as “a s paramount deity.”


3 See my “Babylonica Hethitica: The ‘babalili’-Ritual’ from Boğazköy,” in Recent Developments in Hittite Archaeology and History, ed. T. A. Yener; Winona Lake, Ir.


5 The neologism is in common use.


8 I have borrowed this concise definition from Fallacy and Revitalization Models in the Debate (ed. L. W. Hurtado; Atlanta: 1998) 29.
Goddess Worship—Ancient and Modern

Ištar" 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 theologian 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....

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," there existed early in the human experience "an original, uniform, peaceful, matriarchal/matrilinial society with the Goddess as deity." This Goddess herself could be described as "a single, ubiquitous, prehistoric and historic paramount deity."¹⁸

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² This neologism is in common use among Goddess theorists and devotees.
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”—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.”

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. 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, this observation does not negate the autonomous existence of historical facts outside of particular discourses. Cleopatra either dalled 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.

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10 Rebirth of the Goddess, 44.


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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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 volkisch 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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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, and the beasts as her offspring. To this argument I would reply, "Kann sein, muß aber nicht," or "Tain'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, and does not overwhelmingly portray a fecund female human as maintained by advocates of the Goddess hypothesis. Furthermore, do the images which 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. 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. Following that conquest by the pastoral, patriarchal, patrilineal societies, the Goddess were subordinated to the rule.

Matriarchy is fundamental to a universal stage in human culture. Political power was first formulated by Johann Jakob Bachofen, mythological tales. Rejected or not, Bachofen's ideas on what were adopted by Friedrich Engels: Woman's role in the Naturre Schocks des Staats, enthusiastically revived by folk and greatly abridged—English published in the Jungian Bollingen Campbell. It was only in the 1; Mary Daly and Charlene Spretti matriarchy to support their ideas.

In the absence of textual evidence, ethnological parallels to test the surely telling that anthropological society—no matter how primitive are dominant over men. Thus, the matriarchal phase of human social particular difficulties for Jungian nonetheless valid as a stage of considerable damage has obviated early history as a progression of patriliney, an important prop of the patriarchy has been knocked out.

19 Christ, Rebirth of the Goddess, 50-53.
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.
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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 classic-
ist Johann Jakob Bachofen,24 primarily on the basis of an analysis of Greek
mythological tales. Rejected or ignored by contemporary classical schol-
ars, 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 pub-
lished in the Jungian Bollingen series with an introduction by Joseph
Campbell. It was only in the late 1970s that feminist theorists including
Mary Daly27 and Charlene Spretnak28 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 so-
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 impor-
tantly, an important prop of the Goddess hypothesis which we are consid-
ering has been knocked out.

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.

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, 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, 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. 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 affairs. They were not denied: midwives were active in many women were normally present musicians, priestesses such as  and "Lady/Goddess" (NIN.DI) which they participated. It is male officials in official worship.

From earliest times the role of great importance in Hittite ceremonies was the apex of the hau chief priest of the state gods and blessing of the monarch reads: May the Tabarna, the king, be Storm-god alone. Heaven, earth alone. He has made the Labarna him the entire Land of Ḫatti. Th entire land with his hand. May I reach the person of the Labara

Although she is not expressly from ritual texts that the queen point of Hittite worship already for the cult is nicely illustrated in the south-central Turkey in which it occurs while her husband Ḫattušil. But what can we say about the Hittite? Of course, the records informative about the state cult than it, but an important window into tions which Hittitologists call "the identification of an "author" the procedure is intended to reso man of the Land of Arzawa: Whi

32 Ibid., 135–43.
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affairs. They were not denied access to temples in Ḫatti, and female prac-
tioners 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. It is my impression that the prominence of fe-
male officers 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,
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 ap-
proach 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 responsi-
bility for the cult is nicely illustrated by the rock relief at Firaktin near Kasevi
in south-central Turkey in which Queen Puduhépa worships the Sun-god-
ess 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 infor-
mative about the state cult than concerning popular beliefs and practices,
but an important window into this latter area is provided by the composi-
tions 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

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 Administra-
37 Tabarna, or Labarna, is a title of the king.
38 IBoT 1.30.
god of the enemy has brought it about, then I do as follows." 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, 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 Hatti, 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, 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 Hatti.” 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).
43 Hittite Birth Rituals, 232–35.
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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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 Hatti, 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 Ḥannahanna, whose intervention is crucial in restoring the equilibrium of the universe in many Anatolian myths, as well as a number of other Mother-goddesses. 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 and Išḫara 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 Istar-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) Arina, who was adopted by the Hittites from their Hattic predecessors, and who is said to “direct the kingship and queenship” of Ḥatti. Her partner was the Storm-god of Ḥatti (or of the Heavens), 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, these divinities constituted a sort of trinity on behalf of whom the mortal royal family governed Ḥatti. This imperial ideology takes concrete form in the sanctuary of Yazılıkaya, situated just outside Ḥattuša. 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

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46 Hittite Birth Rituals, 238–48.
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.
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 “cultural [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.”

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.

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55 M. J. Weaver, “Who is the Go (1989) 64.

56 See J. K. Hoffmeier, Israel in Eg
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Therefore the theologians 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. Whose 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.