Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie

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§ 1. Definition. "Myth" as employed here refers to a narrative whose protagonists are gods and whose events take place in a distant but vaguely-defined past. The incidents discussed in a myth may usually be seen to have ramifications for the world in which its audience lives. In contrast, a "tale" is a story centering on actors who are human, although they may be drawn larger than life. The fate of these characters may be exemplary, but their doings have no cosmological implications. For "tales" from Boğazköy see Literatur* bei den Hethitern § 5. III.

§ 2. Corpus. Most of these compositions have been listed in Chapitre V ("Mythologie") of E. Larroche’s CTH (1971), and the majority are to be found in Larroche 1965, 1969.


The literature quoted in §§ 4a-e, 5a-b, 6a-b, and 7a-c gives the primary philological edition, if any, and a key to the transliterations, translations, and discussions gathered above. Since several of these works follow traditional Hittitological practice in considering tales together with myths, § 10 collects similar information about those narratives. Finally in some instances other important contributions to the establishing of the texts are also registered. These do not, however, claim to be exhaustive bibliographies of all work concerning the compositions in question. Textual material which has become available since the publication of CTH is listed under “Add to CTH”.

Not included in the literature are CTH 310 and 338, which do not contain myths as defined above; the unilingual Hurrian texts of CTH 773–776 (for an expanded list of this material see M. Salvi, SMEA 18 [1977] 75–76) or the Palace myth of CTH 731 (O. Carruba, StBoT 10 [1970] Nr. 1). With the exception of CTH 337, the mythological material scattered throughout the cuneiform Luwian texts (see particularly CTH 764) has also been left out of consideration (see F. Starke, StBoT 30 [1985] for transliterations of these compositions).

§ 3. Typology. It has long been recognized (H. G. Güterbock, Kumaři [1946] 1–3; Mythologies of the Ancient World [1961] 172–75) that the mythological texts from Boğazköy may be divided into two basic groups. On the one hand there are the Anatolian myths, almost all of which are embedded within a larger context, either a magical ritual or a ceremony of the state cult. The structure of these narratives is on the whole rather simple. Much of this Anatolian material goes back to the Old Hittite period, although many of the surviving manuscripts were inscribed later.

On the other hand there are the mythological compositions borrowed from neighboring peoples of the Ancient Near East – from the scribes of the Sumero-Akkadian culture of Mesopotamia, from the Canaanite population of the Levant, and from the Hurrians of northern Syria. These texts for the most part stand alone as independent belles-lettres works, intended for the instruction of the Hittite scribes and possibly for the entertainment of the Hittite court. The bulk of these works were translated or more loosely rendered into Hittite during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries. Their literary structure is more sophisticated than those of the Anatolian group.

§ 4. Anatolian myths. On this material in general see C. Mora, in: F. S. Meriggi (1979) 373–85; and G. Kellerman, Hethitica 7 (1987) 109–47. A Hittic origin for these narratives is indicated by their central Anatolian setting and by the deities of Hittic background who are their featured players. However, the possibility that Indo-European gods are in some instances hidden behind Hittic designations (E. Masson 1991, 24–33) cannot be entirely ruled out. These myths usually constituted the oral components of a ritual performance. The primordial event memorialized in the text served as a paradigm for the resolution of a parallel contemporary problem. The intimate connection between the actions of the gods on the mythic level and those of the humans in the mundane world is underscored by the fact that in some compositions (e.g., CTH 324) it is not clear exactly where the role of the goddess of magic
Kamrušepa leaves off and that of the human practitioner begins.

§ 4a. The Moon which Fell from Heaven (CTH 727). This short and fragmentary bilingual Hittite-Hittite mythology is contained within a Hittite-language ritual to be carried out “when the Storm-god thunders frightfully.” It describes how the Moon-god plummets from the sky, pursued by the rains of a hostile Storm-god. The intervention of the deities Ḥapantali and Kamrušepa is apparently required to return the deity to his place. Since there is an emphasis in this narrative on the anxiety of the Moon-god, perhaps the ritual was intended to alleviate psychological distress.


§ 4b. Disappearing Deity (CTH 323–36). This genre of mythological text is often referred to as the “Telipinu myth” (see Telipinu*-Mythos) because the most numerous and best-preserved exemplars (H. Otten, Die Überlieferungen des Telipinu-Mythus [1942]) deal with this agricultural deity. But about a dozen different divine protagonists are now known for this myth. In each narrative, the god or goddess becomes angry and departs into the wilderness, taking along the forces of fertility and growth. As a result, the cosmos grinds to a halt. Reproduction of plants and animals ceases, and gods as well as humans are beset by hunger. The efforts of both the great and the small gods to learn the whereabouts of their sulking colleague are of no avail. Only when the bee is dispatched at the suggestion of the Mother-goddess is the missing deity discovered, asleep in a grove. Stung to attention, the alienated god or goddess must now be reconciled and induced to return to his or her post through the combined propitiations of gods and humans. It is these very actions which make up the ritual within which the narrative is presented.

These ceremonies belong to the type of rite known as muqarar/mukəšar, “evocation rituals.” It is important to stress that the Disappearing Deity does not die, and that most of these rituals are not concerned with the procession of the seasons. It seems that any god or goddess might appear in such a mythological context, and that the encompassing rite was intended to counter difficulties arising in that portion of the universe for which he or she was directly responsible. Thus CTH 333, which features the goddesses Anzili and Zukki, is probably a birth ritual (G. Beckman, StBoT 29 [1983] 77–78), while CTH 326–328 seemingly address the misfortunes of the prominent individuals whose personal Storm-gods are involved. These latter texts are almost certainly not fertility rituals (cf. G. Kellerman, in: Fs. H. Gütterbock [1986] 120–23).

Small differences in the story line even among narratives featuring the same deity suggest that the written texts are based on an oral tradition. One version of the vanishing of the Sun-god (KBo. 26, 136 + KBo. 24, 151) diverges more significantly in that the absence of the god brings on madness rather than sterility for humans and beasts (A. M. Polvani, Etudes 4 [1991] 73–74). Standing in stronger contrast is another rendering of the Sun-god's disappearance (VBoT 58 = “Yozgat Tablet” and dupl. KUB 53, 20 = CTH 323). This narrative, in which the personified “Paralysis” (“Frost”?) seize much of the world, does indeed seem to reflect the onset of winter (T. H. Gaster, Thespis [1961] 270–83; E. Masson 1991, 63–67).


Add to CTH: Bo. 4861.


§ 4 c. Illujanka (CTH 312). This is the cult myth of the purulli festival of Nerik, explicitly said to be recited in the course of its performance. The text presents two different narratives relating the defeat of the Storm-god by Illujanka ("serpent") (see Drachenkampf). In each version the deity returns to fight another day, ultimately prevailing over his antagonist through guile and with the assistance of a mortal. But both of these mortal helpmates perish in turn because of their too intimate relationship with a deity. The "moral" of these stories seems to be that while humans indeed have a necessary role to play in the maintenance of the cosmos, they must recognize and accept their own subordinate place in the universe (G. Beckman, JANES 14 [1982] 24-25).

The attempt to find an historical core for these myths in the conflict between Hitites and Kaška in northern Anatolia (H. G. Gütterbock, Anatolica 14 [1987] 93-94) is not convincing, if only because the narratives had their origins in a period prior to the events in question. Similarities of the Illujanka text with the Greek myth of Zeus and Typhon were observed early on (W. Porzig, KIF 1 [1930] 379-86). While the terminology employed by the mythographers of the Greeks and the Hitites to describe the slaying of a dragon may derive from Indo-European poetic language, the myth itself probably passed from Anatolia to Greece in the late second millennium and does not represent an inherited Indo-European mythological archetype (C. Watkins, CRAI 1992, 319-320).


§ 4 d. Telipinus and the Daughter of the Sea (CTH 322). Similar in theme to the Disappearing Deity myths, this composition relates the suffering of the world after the capture of the Sun-god by the Sea. Telipinus recovers the solar deity as a wedding gift from the latter upon his daughter in marriage. On a practical level, the story hinges on Anatolian marriage practices (H. A. Hoffner, Jr., Unity and Diversity [1975] 137-38).

§ 4f. Ḫaššušara and Pirwa (CTH 337). This fragmentary text, apparently part of a Luwian-Hittite bilingual (E. Starke, StBoT 30 [1985] 2:16 f.), cannot yet be fully understood. It seems to involve the blessing of the Hittite king by Pirwa and his spouse Ḫaššušara.


§ 4f. Other. Short mythological narratives and allusions to myths within incantations are to be encountered throughout the religious texts from the Hittite capital. Indeed, given the intimate connection of Anatolian myths and rituals (see § 3), E. Laroche's assignment of texts to the mythological chapter of CTH was of necessity somewhat arbitrary. Unfortunately the scattered mythologemes of this sort have never been systematically collected. A few examples will serve as illustration:

The Rituals of Zuwi (CTH 412 - see N. Oettinger, StBoT 22 [1976] 44 for an excerpt) and CTH 457 (portions translated by Hoffner 1990, 32-33 and Ünal 1994, 827 f.) are particularly rich in mythological material. The Ritual of Ḫanittâšu (CTH 395) directed to the Sun-god features a discussion between this deity and all the gods concerning the fate of mortals (KUB 58, 94 i 7-22; s. Ükal 1996).

CTH 671 (V. Haas, Der Kult von Nerik [1970] 140-74; 1994, 603-7) contains two long incantations to secure rain for the land and favor for the royal family. Paralleling the Disappearing Deity motif, the first seeks to bring the Storm-god of Nerik back from the underworld, where he has withdrawn in a huff, while the second relates how the god's return from "the nine rivers" is secured with the aid of the Marâšanta and Nakâštîajâ Rivers. A Hattic-Hittite bilingual mythological passage included in the building ritual CTH 725 tells how the Sun-god constructs a house in the town of Lihzina as an archetype for the palace which the king is undertaking (N. Boysan-Dietrich, THeth. 12 [1987] 41-42). In KUB 56, 17 (H. Klengel, int. Fs. G. Puiglieo-Carratelli [1988] 101-10), a tablet containing only a single incantation, the magician Katažzipuri/Kamrušepa and the fate-goddess Papaḫa arrange for the removal of evil, sickness, and fright from a man and his entire family.

§ 5. Mesopotamian myths. As with other literary compositions in the Mesopotamian canonical tradition found at Boğazkêy, some of these texts were imported directly from Assyria or Babylonia, while other material arrived via Hurrian intermediaries (G. Beckman, JCS 35 [1983] 100-03).

§ 5a. Gilgameš* (CTH 341). The adventures of the Sumerian hero are represented at Boğazkêy by texts in three languages. A small Akkadian fragment from the Empire period dealing with Enkidu's dream (KUB 4, 12) shows similarities to an episode in Tablet V of the Twelve Tablet Edition (J. Tigg, The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic [1982] 121-23). Additional Akkadian fragments discovered in 1983 (KBo. 32, 128-33) are written in Middle Hittite script and apparently belong to a three-tablet text describing events up through the death of Enkidu. This version shows similarities with both the Old Babylonian tradition and the later Uruk version (G. Wilhelm, ZA 78 [1988] 116).

More than one text may be represented by the scrappy Hurrian material, since colophons refer to both "the fourth tablet of Hûwawa" and "the [Nth] tablet of Gilgameš." Deities are referred to by their Hurrian names. (See A. Kammenhuber, MSS 21 [1967] 47-48).

The proemium of the Hittite-language version, "[I will sing] the praise [of Gilgameš], the hero" (H. Otten, IstM 8 [1958] 98-99), and the colophon of another tablet, "First Tablet of the Song (SîR) of Gilgameš" (KUB 8, 48+ KBo. 19, 116), betray the Hurrian background of this version, for it is only with the compositions of this group that such terminology is otherwise found (see § 7). The Hittite recounting of the exploits of Gilgameš stresses the events in the Cedar Forest at the expense of earlier happenings in Uruk.

§ 5b. **Attahaski** (CTH 347). The Mesopotamian Flood Story (see Sintflutmythos*) is attested in both an Akkadian fragment (KBo. 36, 26) and the scrap of a Hittite translation (KUB 36, 74). Boğazköy joins Ugarit (RS 22.421) as peripheral sites yielding witnesses to this text.

*Attahaski, Akkadian. CTH 347. I. – Add to CTH: KBo. 36, 26.


§ 5c. Other. KUB 44, 4+ KBo. 13, 241 rev. 1-18 seems to present a garbled version of the Mesopotamian "Cow of Sin" motif (N. Veldhuis, A Cow of Sin [1991]) as part of a partition ritual (Beckman, StBoT 29 [1983] 186-87).

§ 6. Canaanite myths. Although these compositions featuring West Semitic deities undoubtedly entered Hatti from her domains in Syria, the particular episodes recounted here are not found in the texts from Ugarit itself (H. Otten, MDOG 85 [1953] 27-38).

§ 6a. **Elkinsirra and Altersu** (CTH 342). This story of sexual intrigue and humiliation involving Elkinsirra ("El, Creator of the Earth"), his wife Altersu, and the Storm-god, is contained in a ritual. Was this rite perhaps intended for the treatment of impotence (V. Haas, 1994, 173)?


§ 6b. Other. Two fragments (CTH 349) may belong to the Ba'al cycle (Güterbock, Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft Bd. 1 [1978] 234), while KUB 33, 108 discusses the violation of the goddess ISTAR by the Syrian Mount Pišaštā and alludes to the victory of the Storm-god over the Sea.


§ 7. Hurrian myths. The better-preserved of these compositions are all referred to as "songs" (ŠIR) and are indeed apparently composed in bound speech (Güterbock, JCS 5 [1951] 141-144; I. McNeil, AnSt. 13 [1963] 237-42).

§ 7a. **Kumarbi cycle** (CTH 343-345, 364). For the plots of these myths see Kumarbi* § 4a-h. The Songs of Kumarbi, of Išdammu*, of 4-LAMMA (see Lamma C*), and of Ulikummi* are all parts of a single narrative complex in which the Storm-god assumes power ("kingship") in the universe and defends it against various challengers. Most of these opponents have been engendered by – and all are working in the interests of – the previous celestial king, Kumarbi. Central to the development of the plot is the conflict of two lines of gods, engendered by Alalu and Anu, respectively (Hoffner, Jr., Unity and Diversity [1975] 138-39) (see Göttergenealogie*). Since Silver is now known to have been the son of Kumarbi, his Song must also somehow be integrated into this body of narrative (Hoffner, Jr. in: Fests. H. Otten [1988] 165-66).


§ 7b. Hurro-Hittite Bilingual, “The Song of Release.” This complex composition was translated into Hittite during the Middle Hittite period, but it contains Syrian traditions of greater antiquity. It is composed of four sections: 1) the description of a banquet put on for Tešub in the underworld by its queen Allani; 2) a series of parables with explicitly drawn moral lessons; 3) a myth in which listeners are called upon to help release Tešub from hunger, thirst, nakedness, and debt slavery; and 4) a fragmentary tale about the conflict between Ebla and neighboring cities over a group of hostages. The common theme of these otherwise disparate elements seems to be reconciliation – of the powers of the cosmos, of individual humans, and of political entities (E. Neu, in: (ed.) B. Janowski et al., Religionsgeschichtliche Beziehungen zwischen Kleinasiern, Nordsyrier, und dem Alten Testament [1993] 329–61).

§ 7c. Other. CTH 365 is a ritual for the Mala River, to be performed when plague breaks out. It includes a myth in which the gods install “the son of the Sun-god” as king in the land. Its placement among the Hurrian myths is uncertain. Most of the fragments grouped under CTH 350–54 are too poorly preserved for useful evaluation.

§ 8. Topics treated in myth. It is risky to draw general conclusions about the beliefs of the Hittites on the basis of material of such heterogeneous origin. In particular, it is uncertain to what degree concepts found in the foreign myths were familiar to the ordinary person in Hatti, or even to members of the court of Ḫattuša. In any case, even when we take terse allusions in incantations into account, the repertoire of mythological motifs and concerns found in the Boğaşköy texts is sparse compared to what is available in the Mesopotamian corpus.

§ 8 a. Cosmogony. Disappointingly little is said on this subject in Hittite texts. The incantation KUB 57, 66 iii 16 reads: “The crescent moon arose. The darkness (gave birth to) the earth, and the light gave birth to the stars.” It is not clear whether this is a cosmogonic reference or simply a poetic description of the rising of the moon. According to the Song of Ullikummi (CTH 345),
o.c., Abb. 203 – see J. Börker-Klähn, ZA 67 (1977) 64–72.

In addition, a narrative involving deities is surely encoded in the Tyszkiwicz Seal (Bittel, o.c., Abb. 150–53), while Hittite cosmogonic concepts must inform the sculpture of Eflätun Pinar (Bittel, o.c., Abb. 257), the ceremonial ax found at Šarkıla (Bittel, o.c., Abb. 341), and the Hittite ivory plaque from Megiddo (R. Alexander, INES 50 [1991] 161–83).

§ 10. Hittite Tales.


Kelii, Hurrian: CTH 361. II. Add to CTH: KBo. 27, 218-219, 12, 107; 31, 114-115 (?); KUB 47, 1-8, 52, 114-115 (?); ABoT 36.


B. de Vries 1967: The Style of Hittite Epic and Mythology (PhD diss. Brandeis Univ.).

G. Beekman

Mythologie, B. I. In der mesopotamischen Kunst. s.a. Götterdarstellungen in der Bildhauerkunst*, Mischwesen* (A. §§ 2.5, 7; B); Pantheon*, Ritual*.


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"In principle, the sort of relationship that exists between myth and literature exists also with respect to the arts" (K. W. Bolle/ R. G. A. Buxton, The New Encyclopedia Britannica3 [1990 impression] vol. 24, 716). In general, myths, legends and folktales usually begin life as orally transmitted narratives. Versions of some of these stories may later be committed to writing, while the same or other tales, or variant versions of the same tales, may be reflected in other media, especially in the visual arts (including performance art and ‘ritual’, architecture and even such matters as burial customs). While it is probably not an inevitability that myths and other tales will be represented visually (there
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