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From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean
in the Second Millennium B.C.

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Under the Spell of Babylon: Mesopotamian Influence on the Religion of the Hittites

"Religion" is a word with many nuances. In this essay I will employ the term to designate the complex of conceptions concerning the character of parahuman elements in the cosmos, the relationship of men and women to these beings and forces, and the practices by which humans serve, manipulate, and communicate with them. Because the Hittites of second millennium B.C. Anatolia, like all the peoples of the ancient Near East, perceived deities, demons, and the spirits of the dead to be involved in even the most mundane aspects of existence, religion was for them an integral part of daily life.

As a practice so closely tied to the everyday and so self-evident to societal contemporaries, religion was seldom the subject of self-conscious reflection or examination in Hatti (as the Hittites referred to their nation and its territory). Accordingly, the Hittites bequeathed to posterity no theological treatises or surveys of their beliefs. Although we possess literally hundreds of texts dealing directly or indirectly with Hittite religion, none of them may be characterized as "scriptures." Therefore it is necessary for the modern student to reconstruct the religious life of this culture from scattered evidence of the most diverse nature.

First of all, there are cuneiform tablets from the Hittite metropolis and capital Hattuša

(modern Boğazköy, located about a three-hour drive from today's Turkish capital, Ankara),¹ and to a lesser extent from provincial centers elsewhere in central Anatolia such as Tapikka (modern Maşat Höyük), Şariša (modern Kuşaklı), Şapinuwa (modern Ortaköy), and Kayalıpınar (ancient name still uncertain).² The tablets record hymns and prayers, detailed programs for ceremonies of the state cult, magical rituals, mythological narratives, records of divinatory procedures, inventories of the contents of shrines and storehouses, letters, and so forth.³

The excavated remains of more than thirty temples (each called *šunnaš per*, literally "house of the god[s]") in the capital⁴ and several more in lesser cities, some with extensive office precincts and food-storage facilities, demonstrate the important role of religious institutions in Hittite society and administration, as well as in the spiritual life of Hatti.⁵ The temples were the proprietors of large estates, whose produce, along with additional in-kind taxation extracted from other landholders, sustained a substantial redistributive component of the Hittite economy.⁶

Artistic evidence for Hittite religion is provided by images of gods and goddesses in metal (fig. 1), ivory, and other valuable materials; cylinder and stamp seals and their impressions on clay tablets, vessels, and bullae; sculpture in low relief on rock faces and free-standing stones; and ceramics featuring scenes of worship in relief.⁷

Several basic difficulties bedevil the student of Hittite religion: first, almost all of the available written sources pertain to the state cult or to the spiritual needs of the royal family. We have next to no information concerning the religious beliefs and activities of the ordinary Hittite man or woman. Second, Hittite religion was an amalgam of elements drawn from a number of cultural strata: of the indigenous Hattic people and the cultures of the various groups speaking an Anatolian Indo-European language (Hittite, Palaic, or Luwian).⁸ To this mix were added influences from Mesopotamia (Babylonia and Assyria)—discussed



Fig. 1. Silver vessel in the form of a stag with scene in relief showing offerings made to seated deity and deity mounted on stag. Anatolia. Hittite Empire period. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989 1989.281.10

below—and from the Semitic and Hurrian populations of northern Syria.⁹ Finally, the continuous development of central Anatolian civilization throughout the Bronze Ages makes it impossible to present within the scope of this essay a picture accurate in all details across the five-hundred-year history of Hatti.

In their cuneiform texts, Hittite scribes placed the divine determinative or semantic classifier (the DINGIR-sign) not only before the names of gods and goddesses but also before those of demons, numinous topographical features such as springs or mountains, and even parts of temples (for example, the hearth or the pillars).¹⁰ That is, this diacritic could be employed to mark any parahuman and immortal force with the power and inclination to intervene in the affairs of humankind.

For the most part, Hittite deities were conceived as human in form, as illustrated by the gods and goddesses sculpted in the relief processions at the shrine of Yazılıkaya (about a mile outside the walls of the capital);¹¹ some, however, might also on occasion be depicted theriomorphically, that is, in animal form, as the Storm-god in bovine guise or the Protective Deity as a stag. An anthropomorphic divinity is sometimes accompanied by his or her animal manifestation, which may serve as a means of transportation or merely as a mascot. Thus, the Storm-god might ride in a chariot drawn by a bull, while the goddess of love and war Šaušga could stand awkwardly upon the back of her lion-griffin.

For purposes of receiving worship, a god's ultimately ineffable essence could be located in an anthropomorphic or theriomorphic image (fig. 2), in a worked stele or a stone left in its natural state (both called *juwaši*),¹² or in a manufactured symbol, such as a disk of gold, and so on. An idea of the sumptuous character of full-size cult images, none of which have been physically recovered,¹³ may be gleaned from the following introduction to a ritual for establishing the worship of a goddess in a new location:

Thus says the priest of the Deity of the Night: When a person for whom (the matter) of the temple of the Deity of the Night, that is, (the matter) of the Deity of the Night (herself), has become (incumbent)—When it comes about that (s)he builds another temple of the Deity of the Night from (the base of) this temple of the Deity of the Night, and then establishes the deity independently, while (s)he completes the construction fully, the smiths fashion the deity in gold. They also set about decking her out with the accoutrements appropriate to her. Stuck on her back like beads are sun-disks of silver, gold, lapis-lazuli, carnelian, "Babylon stone," chalcedony(?), quartz, and alabaster, as well as life-symbol(s) and morning stars(?) of silver and gold. They set about fashioning them in that manner.¹⁴

Perhaps more typical was the smaller image included among the inventory of a shrine in an outlying village:

The town Lapana, (chief deity the goddess) Iyaya: The divine image is a female statuette of wood, seated and veiled, one cubit (in height). Her head is plated with gold, but the body and throne are plated with tin. Two wooden mountain sheep, plated with tin, sit beneath the deity to the right and left. One eagle plated with tin, two copper staves, and two bronze goblets are on hand as the deity's cultic implements. She has a new temple. Her priest, a male, is a holdover (from an earlier reign).¹⁵

The small metal figurines of deities, recognizable as such by their horned headgear¹⁶ and found throughout central Anatolia, are probably examples of such local divinities.

In any event, the Hittites were well aware that the divine image, whatever its form,



Fig. 2. Silver vessel in the form of a bull. Anatolia. Hittite Empire period. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989 1989.281.11

did not constitute or contain—let alone imprison—the god or goddess. As in Babylonia and Assyria,¹⁷ the performance of a special ritual was necessary in order to render a man-made or hand-selected object a suitable focus for the divine presence. This presence had its true home in that aspect of the cosmos in which it was immanent, as we shall see in a moment.

As polytheists, the Hittites could comfortably honor an unlimited number of deities.¹⁸ Indeed, in the course of their imperial expansion throughout Anatolia and into Syria, they availed themselves of this flexibility by accepting into their pantheon the gods and goddesses of many conquered areas. The process commenced as early as the Old Kingdom (sixteenth century B.C.), with the welcoming of the Storm-god of

the Syrian city of Aleppo into Hatti.¹⁹ It gained momentum in the fifteenth century B.C., with the incorporation of numerous Hurrian deities encountered in southern Anatolia and northern Syria, most importantly the Storm-god Teššub and his spouse Hēbat, the latter originally the eponymous deity of Aleppo. The community of deities worshipped among the Hittites ultimately grew so large that it came to be referred to as the "Thousand Gods of Hatti."²⁰

Most prominent among this myriad of gods were those immanent in the natural phenomena upon which human survival most closely depended:²¹ Storm-gods, who delivered the rains crucial to the dry-farming economy of central Anatolia and in addition assured the flow of rivers and springs; Sun-deities, whose light was

recognized as the basis of all life; and goddesses of the fertile earth. Other deities presided over warfare, sexuality and reproduction, the world of the dead, particular towns or locations, and so forth. Individual human beings, as well as many significant places, objects, and social phenomena, were each watched over by a patron deity (^dLAMMA).²² Thus we meet with the Protective Deity of the King, the Protective Deity of (the town of) Karahna, the Protective Deity of the Army, the Protective Deity of the Quiver, the Protective Deity of the (Palace) Bedroom, the Protective Deity of the Countryside, and many more.

Divinities of similar type often shared a generic designation; accordingly we find "the Storm-god (^dIŠKUR or ^dU) of (the town of) Pittiyarik" and "the Storm-god of (the town of) Šapinuwa," or "the War-god (^dZABABA) of (the town of) Arziya" and "the War-god of (the town of) Illaya." The extent to which such gods were considered avatars of a single deity—to borrow a term from the study of the religion of early India—is uncertain: in some cultic texts we find offerings to or invocations of, for example, "all the Storm-gods of Hatti," while in others worship is directed to an individual member of the class.

Examples of explicit syncretism, similar to the Roman equation of their goddess Venus with the Aphrodite of the Greeks, are attested only in the Empire period (mid-fourteenth to early twelfth century B.C.), particularly the identification of Anatolian with Hurrian deities.²³ The most striking example of this is provided by an excerpt from a mid-thirteenth century B.C. prayer of Queen Puduhepa: "Sun-goddess of (the town of) Arinna, my lady, you are the queen of all lands! In the land of Hatti you have assumed the name Sun-goddess of Arinna, but in respect to the land that you have made (the land) of cedars (that is, Syria), you have assumed the name Hebat."²⁴ It is significant in this regard that the carved labels accompanying the figures of the gods in the temple of Yazılıkaya

present their names in the Hurrian language, not Hittite.

In certain key respects, the divine world mirrored the human societal structure. The pantheon was hierarchical and was ruled by a king, the Storm-god of Hatti (or of the Heavens)—later Tešsub, alongside his queen, the Sun-goddess of Arinna—later Hebat. Along with their son, the Storm-god of (the town of) Zippalanda—later Šarrumma—and grandchildren, Mezzula and Zintuḫi, these monarchs constituted a family, as did other groups of deities at home in various Hittite towns, for instance the deities Zašḫapuna, Zaliyanu, and Tazzuwašši in Tanipiya.

When warranted by common concerns, such as the witnessing of treaties or the rendering of judgment, all the gods of Hatti met in an assembly whose structure and deliberations undoubtedly mirrored those of the gathering of Hittite human dignitaries with which it shared the designation *tuliya*.²⁵ For example, when the late thirteenth century B.C. Hittite king Tudḫaliya IV concluded an agreement with his vassal Kurunta of (the town of) Tarḫuntašša, he invoked all the gods as follows: "And in regard to the fact that I have made this treaty for you, the Thousand Gods are now summoned to assembly in this matter. They shall observe and listen and be witnesses!" (An inclusive list of deities follows.)²⁶ Any violation of the provisions of a treaty thus concluded in the presence of the pantheon would be severely punished by the gods themselves, on occasion even with the death of the culprit.

We know little concerning how the Hittites conceived the origins or the destiny of their cosmos. However, a ritual passage does relate that in primeval times the celestial and chthonic deities took possession of their respective realms, and that human beings were created by Mother-goddesses, presumably from the clay of a riverbank.²⁷ If we allow ourselves to extrapolate from Mesopotamian evidence, we may speculate that men and women were brought into existence in order to perform the labor that sustained the leisurely lives of the gods. Such

in etiology would certainly be in harmony with the role actually played by humans in the world, as I will now illustrate.

The universe of the Hittites was an integrated system, with no clear-cut boundaries separating its levels. Under the right circumstances, gods might mingle with humans, as reported in certain myths.²⁸ The euphemism employed for the death of a king or a member of the royal family, "to become a god" (*šunaš kiš-*), indicates that a man of sufficient social prominence might attain the status of a minor deity.

As in Mesopotamia, the role of humans was unquestionably to serve the gods, providing for their sustenance, pleasure, and entertainment. That the gods were actually dependent upon these attentions is evident from a passage in a prayer of Muršili II (late fourteenth century B.C.), who reminds them of the consequences of a severe outbreak of plague:

All of the land of Ḫatti is dying, so that no one prepares the sacrificial loaf and libation for you. The plowmen who used to work the fields of the gods have died, so that no one works or reaps the fields of the gods any longer. The miller-women who used to prepare the sacrificial loaves of the gods have died, so that they no longer make the sacrificial loaves. As for the corral and sheepfold from which one used to cull the offerings of sheep and cattle—the cowherds and shepherds have died, and the corral and sheepfold are empty. So it has come about that the sacrificial loaves, libations, and animal sacrifices are cut off. Yet you come to us, o gods, and hold us responsible in this matter!²⁹

In return for the necessary maintenance, the satisfied deities would cause crops to thrive, domestic animals to multiply, human society to prosper, and Hittite armies to prevail in battle. This conception is reflected in a prayer in which a god is

enjoined, "Give life, health, strength, long years, and joy in the future to the king, queen, princes, and to (all) the land of Ḫatti! And give to them future thriving of grain, vines, fruit, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, mules (*šir!*), asses—together with wild animals—and of human beings!"³⁰

Conversely, a neglected or offended god or goddess could wreak havoc on an individual, a household, or all of Ḫatti. Attested manifestations of divine displeasure include epidemic, military defeat, and the illness of the king. When confronted with misfortune, it was necessary for the individual sufferer—or the royal establishment on behalf of the community as a whole—to determine which deity was angry, the cause(s) of his or her rage, and the appropriate corrective measures.

The power of deities to determine human affairs was known as *parā ḫand(and)atar*—literally "prior arrangement," but often best rendered as "providence." For example, in his "Apology,"³¹ Ḫattušili III attributes the successful course of his career to the intervention of his patron goddess, Šaušga of (the town of) Šamuḫa. When he had risen in revolt against his nephew, the king Urḫi-Tešsub: "Šaušga, my lady, supported me, and things turned out as she had promised me. Šaušga, my lady, on that very occasion revealed her divine providence (*parā ḫandandatar*) in great measure" (by bringing about victory over my rival).³² Indeed, every Hittite king was under the protection of his own patron deity, as illustrated by a relief in the shrine of Yazılıkaya depicting Tudḫaliya IV in the embrace of Šarrumma (fig. 3).

The human monarch, one of whose titles was "My Sun-god," stood at the intersection of the divine sphere with that of humans, constituting the linchpin of the entire structure.³³ He had been allotted his paramount position in society by the leading deities themselves: "The gods, the Sun-goddess and the Storm-god, have entrusted to me, the King, my land and my household, so that I, the King, should protect my land and my

household on my own behalf."³⁴ In this role he was responsible for ensuring that the people of Hatti properly performed their obligations to their divine masters. In principle, the king directed all communal religious activities, serving as the high priest of every deity, most importantly that of the Sun-goddess of Arinna, who from the earliest days was the protector and proprietor of the Hittite state.

While practicalities made it necessary for the king to delegate most of his religious duties, twice yearly, in spring and autumn, he made a progress through the towns of the Hittite heartland, officiating in the sanctuaries of the local divinities. Furthermore, in times of crisis such as the plague addressed above by Muršili II, the ruler appeared in person before the gods to present Hatti's *arkuwar*, "plaidoyer, plea." The best example of such a brief delivered to a divine authority is that very prayer of Muršili II just excerpted.

As also mentioned earlier, it was of the greatest importance that the monarch and

the gods maintain a regular exchange of information so that difficulties in the functioning of the cosmos might be rectified to their mutual benefit. The king reported directly to his divine lords through his prayers, but traffic in the other direction was necessarily more complex. Accordingly, Muršili II demanded of the gods concerning the cause of an epidemic, "Either let me see it in a dream, or let it be established through an oracle, or let a prophet (*šiuṃaš antuḫšaš*, literally "man of god") speak of it. Or all the priests shall perform an incubation rite (literally, "sleep purely") concerning that which I have instructed them."³⁵ We may observe that the communication media employed by the gods were of two types: those initiated by the divinities (omens) and those solicited by humans (oracles).

A god might contact a person directly by appearing in a dream, cause a third party to utter a prophecy, or send a portent in the form of unusual human or animal behavior.³⁶ The sign might also be an astronomical occurrence (for example, a solar or lunar eclipse or shooting star), a meteorological phenomenon (for example, a lightning strike), or any abnormal terrestrial event.

Alternatively, through various procedures a specialist serving in the Hittite religious bureaucracy could pose a question to a deity and receive a reply.³⁷ Divinatory techniques included the examination of the entrails of a sacrificed animal (extispicy), a practice borrowed by the Hittites from Mesopotamia via northern Syria; the observation of the flight and other behavior of birds (augury); incubation; and the still obscure "lot" (KIN) oracle.³⁸ These various methods were often employed in series as checks upon the results obtained by one or another.

The following is an excerpt from a lengthy series of such questions:

In regard to the fact that you, o deity of Arušna, were ascertained to be angry with His Majesty (the King), is this because the Queen cursed (the palace woman) Ammattalla before the



Fig. 3. Rock relief. Yazılıkaya. Reign of Tudḫaliya IV, ca. 1237–1209 B.C.

deity of Arušna? Because Ammattalla began to concern herself with the deity, yet did not go back and forth (in service to the deity)? Because the son of Ammattalla has dressed himself in garments entrusted to his mother and was summoned to the palace? If you, o god, are angry about this, let the extispicy be unfavorable. . . . (Here the technical details of the observation are reported.) (Result:) Unfavorable. If you, O god, are angry *only* about this, let the duck oracle be favorable. . . . (Result:) Unfavorable. . . .³⁹

The programs of the state cult—probably the most numerous type of text among the surviving Hittite records—prescribe the course of worship in great detail. These religious ceremonies were conducted at regular intervals—daily, monthly, yearly, or at some point in the agricultural cycle (such as the harvest, trimming of the vines, opening of the grain-storage vessels, and so forth)—and are designated by the Sumerogram EZEN, “festival.”⁴⁰ During these observances, gods and goddesses were lavished with attentions that were likely similar to those customarily enjoyed by the king and his courtiers. The divinities were praised through the recitation of hymns and provided with much food and drink.⁴¹ They were entertained by singers and dancers and amused by jesters, and they observed the best efforts of athletes in various competitions,⁴² including footraces, the shot put, and even mock battles. Strict standards of purity were enforced for officials,⁴³ and foreigners were customarily barred from the temple precincts. Celebrations might also include a communal meal for a wider circle of human participants,⁴⁴ undoubtedly made up of individuals from the higher ranks of society.

We may gain an idea of the character of regular divine service from the following passage:

The king and queen, while seated, toast the War-god. The *ḫalliyari*-men

(play) the large stringed instruments and sing. The clapper-priest claps. The cupbearer brings one snack loaf from outside and gives (it) to the king. The king breaks (it) and takes a bite. The palace functionaries take the napkins from the king and queen. The crouching (cupbearer) enters. The king and queen, while standing, toast the (divinized) Day. The jester speaks; the clapper claps; the *kita*-man cries “*alja!*”⁴⁵

In the rite described in this passage, which is quite typical for the festivals, the duties of the royal couple are rather simple. The more technical aspects of worship were the preserve of religious professionals.

The Hittite scribes employed the Sumerogram SISKUR/SÍSKUR, “ritual,” as a label for *rites de passage*, including those concerned with birth, puberty, and death,⁴⁶ as well as for ceremonies that were performed only as the need arose—for exigencies such as illness, impotence, miscarriage, or familial strife. These lamentable conditions were held to result from the influence of sorcery or black magic (*alwanzatar*), and/or from infection with *papratar*, “impurity.” The immediate goal of treatment was to remove these malign influences, a task largely to be accomplished through the use of analogic magic, which almost always featured a spoken incantation.⁴⁷

Typical in structure, if unusually colorful in its imagery, is this magical speech from a ritual addressed to deities of the underworld: “As a ram mounts a ewe and she becomes pregnant, so let this (polluted) city and house become a ram, and let it mount the Dark Earth in the steppe! And let the Dark Earth become pregnant with the blood, impurity (*papratar*), and sin!”⁴⁸

It is interesting to observe that women were particularly prominent among magicians,⁴⁹ despite their subordinate role among the college of cultic experts in the temples. This is probably due to the special occult knowledge that, as in many other cultures, females were thought to acquire in the

process of giving and assisting at birth. One of the most common titles borne by these female practitioners was "the one of birth" (*ijašamuaš*), often represented by the Sumerogram ^{MUNUS}ŠU.GI, "old woman."

Many of the descriptions of magical rituals found at Hattuša were collected from practitioners resident in various towns throughout the Hittite realm, apparently to make their recommended procedures available to magic specialists attending the royal family, should one of its members suffer from any of the relevant problems. This body of folk remedies gathered from all over Hatti affords a rare window onto the beliefs and practices of the common people of Anatolia.

The birth of each person was overseen by a group of Mother-goddesses (DINGIR.MAḤ.MEŠ/ḪI.A) and Fate Deities (*Gulšeš*). One of the latter seemingly accompanied the individual throughout life as a kind of guardian angel. The relationship of this protector to a man or woman's Protective Deity (^{LAMMA}) remains obscure.

The existence of a son or daughter of Hatti did not end with death. Rather, he or she passed to an underworld, about which, regrettably, we are very poorly informed. We do learn, however, that in this Anatolian Sheol or Hades even close relatives failed to recognize one another, and that their daily fare was mud and dirty water.⁵⁰ Despite their pitiful lot, the spirits of the dead (*akkant-*, GIDIM; sometimes personalized as the deity Zawalli⁵¹) could nonetheless intervene for good—but more frequently for ill—in the business of their living descendants.

However, as indicated by the euphemism "to become a god," the king and his closest relatives were thought to enjoy a more pleasant afterlife. A passage from a royal funerary ritual indicates that the deceased monarch became the owner of a herd of livestock grazing in a kind of Elysian Fields,⁵² perhaps a fond reminiscence of a simpler lifestyle practiced by his forebears before Indo-European groups migrated into the orbit of the civilizations of the ancient

Near East. Furthermore, it appears that there was a development in the ideology of kingship during the final decades of the existence of the Hittite state, and that the ruler came to enjoy a certain divine status even during his lifetime.⁵³

I turn now to the influence of Mesopotamian culture upon this system of belief, which we have already observed in the areas of divination and of the creation of humankind. As mentioned at the outset, most of our knowledge of Hittite religion is based upon documents from the archives compiled by the scribes of the royal bureaucracy. Because this material is encoded in a writing system originally invented for a foreign language—the Sumerian of southern Mesopotamia—and furthermore a system that makes frequent use of ideograms, or word-signs, to designate deities, it was inevitable that Hittite religion be, to some extent, influenced by that of Mesopotamia, and perhaps also by that of northern Syria, the area from which the Anatolians most directly imported cuneiform and its culture.

In particular, the question I will now focus upon concerns a single ideogram, ^{UTU}, employed by the Hittite scribes to designate the Mesopotamian Sun-god Šamaš in Akkadian-language texts borrowed from the south and their own solar deity in those documents composed in the Hittite chancellery, in both the Hittite and Akkadian languages. To what extent were the characteristics and cosmic responsibilities associated with the former transferred to the latter (fig. 4)?⁵⁴

There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of attestations of the expression ^{UTU}, with or without phonetic complementation,⁵⁵ in Hittite-language documents from Hattuša. Identifying the deity intended in a particular occurrence is largely a matter of assigning the text to the appropriate cultural stratum within the composite culture of Hatti and then attaching the name by which the Sun was known within that group: Eštan in Hattic, Ištanu in Hittite,

iwat in Luwian, Tiyat in Palaic, Šimegi in Hurrian, or Šamaš in Akkadian.

In one respect, our problem is simpler in regard to this divinity than for other gods and goddesses customarily written ideographically. We have no evidence in any uniform source for the existence of more than one Sun. That is, a single orb illuminates the entire world, however differently various peoples might refer to him or her.⁵⁶ Therefore, we may confidently assume that the relationship among all of the various solar deities is one of syncretism. In contrast, for instance, the terms ^dISKUR ^{URU}Ziplanta, ^dISKUR ^{URU}Kuliwišna, and ^dISKUR ^{URU}Halpa might conceivably be variant designations employed in different towns for the same storm-god; it is also possible that to the Hittites they indicated either completely separate deities⁵⁷ or perhaps avatars of an archetype, like the Virgins of neighboring villages in contemporary rural France and Spain.

Let us now take a look at the identities assigned to the solar deity by the constituent strands of the culture of Hatti. The Eštan worshipped by the indigenous Hattic people was female,⁵⁸ as demonstrated by her epithet *attah*, “queen.” She might also be referred to by the Hattic epithet Wurunšemu, apparently meaning “Mother of the Earth,” or, after her primary cult site—she was the sun-goddess of the city of Arinna—^dUTU ^{JRU}Arinna,⁵⁹ or as Arinnitti (she of Arinna).

Eštan, who appears in the Hittite pantheon as Ištanu (also spelled Aštanu and Eštanu), indeed possessed celestial features, being called, for example, “the torch of the land of Hatti,” and quite possibly already represented by the “solar standards” excavated at pre-Hittite Alaca Höyük.⁶⁰ But she was most often associated with the Netherworld, in which capacity she also bore the title “Sun-goddess of the Earth.”⁶¹ How are we to understand this wide range of activity? Quite simply, this deity, like the Mesopotamian Šamaš, daily executed a vast circuit, passing from east to west through the sky during daylight hours, and crossing back eastward beneath the earth during the

night in order to begin her journey anew the following morning.⁶²

Already during the Old Kingdom, the Sun-goddess was provided with a male counterpart—or perhaps better, a manifestation, also named Ištanu,⁶³ who assumed the celestial duties, leaving the chthonic responsibilities to his feminine counterpart. For purposes of disambiguation, the male figure could be referred to more fully as the “Sun-deity of Heaven” or “of Hatti.” In the religion of the Hittite Empire, these aspects of a single divinity with an alternate gender could sometimes appear as separate, individual, entities in offering lists⁶⁴ and incantations. For example, note the Luwian speech: “If he or she (a sufferer) is alive, let the Sun-god (^dUTU-za) above deliver him or her. If he or she is dead, let the Sun-goddess of the Earth (*tiyammaššit* ^dUTU-za) deliver him or her—the accursed person afflicted by a (broken) oath!”⁶⁵

As in other aspects of the religious life of Hatti, it is difficult to recognize inherited Indo-European features in Hittite religious conceptions concerning the sun. Beyond the conceptualization of the sun’s



Fig. 4. Fragmentary cuneiform tablet of epic of Gilgamesh inscribed in Akkadian by a Hittite scribe. Hattuša. Hittite Empire period. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin VAT12890

passage across the heavens as taking place in a horse-drawn chariot, an idea to which I will return, almost nothing of Ištanu's character must be attributed to the Indo-European heritage.⁶⁶ Very little is known about the solar deities of the two other Indo-European-speaking groups in Hatti, Tiyat of the Palaeans or Tiwat of the Luwians. Note only that the root from which their names derive (*diēu-) appears in Hittite as the base of the common words for "deity" (*šiu(na-)*) and "day" (*šiuwatt-*).⁶⁷

The Hurrian Sun-god, Šimegi, cannot (yet?) be distinguished sufficiently from the Mesopotamian Sun-god (fig. 5), so we turn now to Utu of Sumer, more familiar to the Hittites as Šamaš of Babylonia, Assyria, and



Fig. 5. Rock relief depicting the Hittite king Tudḫaliya IV. His religious regalia is identical to that worn by the Sun-god as depicted in the same sanctuary. The king carries his name and titles written in the Luwian hieroglyphic script. Yazılıkaya. Hittite Empire period

inland Syria.⁶⁸ This Šamaš, a male deity, was immanent in the fiery ball of the sun, casting his life-giving rays over the entirety of the earth. He emerged in the morning from the heavenly gate in the eastern mountains and retired through the westerly gate in the Cedar Forest every evening, thence passing eastward through the nether sky (AN.ŠAG) situated "above" the Underworld.⁶⁹ In the course of his orbit, witnessing everything and every action on the earth and in the Netherworld, Šamaš served as the guardian of justice, as well as the convener and chief judge of the divine assembly. Because he was equally present in the upper and lower realms, Šamaš also functioned as the primary conduit between the living and the dead and as the guarantor of food and libations for the shades.

His place in the Mesopotamian universe is already stated succinctly in the Sumerian poem *Enki and the World Order*, composed in the late third millennium B.C., where, of course, he bears his earlier name, Sumerian Utu:

Young man Utu, . . . father of the Great City (i.e., the realm of the dead)—the place from which the days come out—great herald of the pure sky, judge (in charge) of the decisions of the gods, the one wearing a lapis-lazuli beard, who rises from the horizon into the pure sky, Utu, son born of (the goddess) Ningal—Enki (king of the gods) has indeed placed you in charge of the entire heaven and earth.⁷⁰

Having completed a review of the solar deities familiar in Hatti, we may now turn to the nature and function of Ištanu within the composite culture we know as Hittite. These characteristics are most conveniently on view in a series of Hittite-language prayers directed to the sun, the prototype for which may originally have been composed as early as the Old Hittite period.⁷¹ I now present my translation of the hymnic prologue to these prayers, as reconstructed from the several variant texts.⁷² This

mposition, which we may call "The Great Solar Hymn," is spoken by a priest on behalf of a client, referred to here as "So-and-so":

O Sun-god, my lord, just lord of judgment; o king of heaven and earth. It is you who rule the lands, you alone who bestow mastery. You alone are just; you alone have mercy. Only you respond to evocations. You are the merciful Sun-god, and you (indeed) have mercy. O Sun-god, fully grown son of (the goddess) Ningal, your beard is of lapis-lazuli. So-and-so, your servant, has now prostrated himself before you and is speaking to you.

Within the circumference of heaven and earth you alone, o Sun-god, are the source of illumination. O Sun-god, mighty king, son of Ningal, it is you who establish custom and regulation for the people. Ultimate authority has been granted to you alone. You are the just lord of rule. You are the father and mother of every land.

O Sun-god, great king, your father (divine) Enlil has placed the lands and the four corners (of the universe) in your hand alone. You are the lord of judgment, tireless in the place of judgment. Among the ancient gods you are the mighty Sun-god. It is you who prepare the offerings of the gods. It is you who allot the portions of the ancient gods (in the Netherworld). The door of heaven is opened only for you, o Sun-god, and only you, venerated Sun-god, pass through heaven's gate.

The gods of heaven are bowed down to you alone; the gods of earth are bowed down to you alone. Whatever you say, o Sun-god, in return the gods prostrate themselves only to you. O Sun-god, you are the father and mother of the oppressed and orphaned person. You alone, o Sun-god, exact retribution for the orphaned and oppressed person.

When at dawn the sun rises in the heavens, it is your illumination, o Sun-god, that reaches all the upper and lower lands. You judge the case of the dog and the pig. And the case of the wild beasts who cannot speak with their mouths—that too you judge. You alone judge the case of the evil and malicious person. The person with whom the gods are angry and whom they neglect—you care for him and have mercy on him. O Sun-god, sustain this mortal, your servant, so that he might begin to offer bread and beer to the Sun-god regularly. O Sun-god, take him, your just servant, by the hand.

And the mortal has hereby poured out barley to the team of four that you, o Sun-god, have harnessed. May your Four eat! And while the Four eat the barley, I bless you, o Sun-god! So-and-so, your servant, is now speaking about a matter with you, and he is listening to your words. O Sun-god, mighty king, you go out among the four corners (of the universe). At your right run the Fears, at your left run the Terrors.

[. . . *Three unintelligible lines*] Your vizier (divine) Bunene walks on your right. Your vizier [(divine) Mēšaru ("Justice")] walks on your left. And you go across the sky, o Sun-god.

And above, [you make an allotment] to the gods of heaven; below, on the Dark Earth, you make an allotment to the ancient gods. But below, [you make an allotment] to the ancient gods of the [Dark] Earth. . . . [So-and-so, your servant, has] now [prostrated himself] before you. O Sun-god, [. . .] him. [Whichever] frightful god [. . .], that deity has turned his gaze aside and does not allow the mortal to act. Whether that deity is in heaven or on the earth, you, o Sun-god, accompany him.⁷³

The Mesopotamian features in this Hittite hymn are striking—from the deity's

parentage, concern with justice, and daily path through the celestial realm to his beard of lapis lazuli. A perusal of preserved Akkadian and Sumerian compositions from Syria and Mesopotamia addressing the Sun-god yields no direct forerunner for this hymn. However, the Boğazköy archives do contain several imported texts concerned with Šamaš that present similar material: an Akkadian-language hymn to this god with a partial duplicate from Ashur, a Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual hymn also found at the Assyrian sites of Nineveh and Sultantepe, and a list of the viziers of Šamaš, duplicated in a tablet recovered in Babylonia.⁷⁴

On the other hand, we may note several elements foreign to the Mesopotamian tradition, including Šamaš's solicitude for the legal cases of swine and canines, a concern also mentioned in another Hittite royal prayer, and the Sun-god's quadriga. The origins of this vehicle remain uncertain. The Greek Helios also traveled in a horse-drawn chariot, but there is no reason to believe that this conception of solar movement was exclusively Indo-European, and the idea might just as well have been transmitted in the opposite direction, from the Near East to Hellas. Indeed, the earliest datable depictions of a deity aboard a chariot—in this case the Semitic Storm-god Adad—are found on seals from the Sargonic period of the twenty-fourth century B.C.⁷⁵

In any event, the truly significant point here is that this thoroughly Mesopotamian-inspired hymn served as an introduction to a number of prayers directed by Hittite notables to their own solar deity. That is, these borrowed ideas were not employed, say, in a literary exercise of the scribal school, but rather found their way into instruments of actual Hittite religious practice. Ištanu would not have responded favorably to a plea prefixed with praise irrelevant to his person and activities. Thus, we may conclude that, at least for the elite of Hatti, the importation of Mesopotamian cuneiform writing and culture brought with it real consequences for their spiritual and intellectual life. *Ex Oriente lux!*

Abbreviations employed here for the publications of cuneiform texts are:

CTH: Laroche 1971

KAR: Ebeling 1915–23

KUB: *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boğazköi* 1921–90

OECT: *Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts* 1923–30

1. For a convenient introduction to the recent state of the excavations, see Seeher 2002.
2. For cuneiform tablets found at Maşat Höyük, see T. Özgüç 1980; Alp 1991; at Kuşaklı, see Wilhelm 1997; A. Müller-Karpe 2009; at Ortaköy, see Süel 2008; at Kayalıpınar, see A. Müller-Karpe and V. Müller-Karpe 2009.
3. For an overview, see Haas 2006; for hymns and prayers, see Singer 2002; for ceremonial programs for the state cult, see Beckman 2005; for magical rituals, see Beckman 1999b; for myths, see Hoffner 1998a; for divinatory protocols, see Haas 2008; for contents of shrines and storehouses, see Koşak 1982; for letters, see Hoffner 2009.
4. Neve 1992.
5. Güterbock 1975; Neve 1975.
6. Klengel 1975.
7. See in general Bittel 1976a; van Loon 1985; Beckman 2004b; for images of deities and cult objects, see Güterbock 1983; for glyptics, see Beran 1967; Herbordt 2005; for sculpture, see Kohlmeyer 1983; Ehringhaus 2005; for ceramics, see Boehmer 1983.
8. For indigenous religious features, see Klinger 1996; on the question of Indo-European relics in Hittite mythology, see Watkins 1995; for elements of Luwian religion, see Hutter 2003.
9. For Semitic influences, see Hoffner 1992; for Hurrian features, see Hoffner 1998b; Trémouille 1999.
10. For the DINGIR-sign before the names of demons, see Carruba 1966; for sacred natural places, see Lombardi 2000; for areas within temples, see Popko 1978.
11. Bittel 1975; Alexander 1986.
12. Hutter 1993.
13. Given the inherent value of the materials from which such statues were constructed, it is extremely unlikely that any will in fact have survived the ravages of conquest and time to be discovered by contemporary archaeologists.
14. For a full translation of this text (CTH 481), see Beckman 2010b, pp. 80–85. Note that the Hittite language does not differentiate between masculine and feminine genders.
15. KUB 38.1 iv 1–7 (CTH 501). For a collection of such texts, see Hazenbos 2003.
16. Beckman forthcoming a.
17. Walker and Dick 2001.
18. For more detail, see Beckman 2003–5b.
19. Klengel 1965.
20. Karasu 2003.
21. For a full listing, see van Gessel 1998.
22. McMahon 1991.

3. Wilhelm 2002.
4. *KUB* 21.27 i 3–6 (CTH 384).
5. Beckman 1982b.
6. Otten 1988a, pp. 24–27. iii 78–iv 15 (CTH 81).
7. Otten and Siegelová 1970.
8. Beckman 1982a.
9. *KUB* 24.3 ii 4'–17' (CTH 376).
10. *KUB* 24.2 rev. 12'–16' (CTH 377).
11. Otten 1981.
12. CTH 81, combined text iv 16–19.
13. Beckman 1995; Beckman 2002.
14. *KUB* 29.1 i 17–19 (CTH 414).
15. *KUB* 14.10 iv 9–13 and duplicates (CTH 378).
16. For contact through a dream, see Mouton 2006; Beckman 2010a; for unusual behavior of sheep as a portent, see Hoffner 1993.
17. Haas 2008.
18. For divination by extispicy, see Schuol 1994a; Schuol 1994b; by bird behavior, see Archi 1975; by incubation, see Mouton 2004; by "lot" oracle, see Orlamünde 2001; Beal 2002.
19. *KUB* 22.70 i 7–11 (CTH 566). Since the diviner had stipulated that an "unfavorable" response would constitute a "yes" to his query, his supposition as to the cause of the deity's displeasure was thus confirmed. But was there anything else on the god's mind? . . .
20. Güterbock 1970.
21. Beckman 2003–5a; Beckman 2004a.
22. For singers and dancers, see de Martino 1995; for jesters, see de Martino 1984; for athletic competitions, see C. Carter 1988.
23. de Martino 2004.
24. Collins 1995.
25. *KUB* 25.6 iv 5–24 (CTH 592).
26. For rites de passage concerned with birth, see Beckman 1983; with puberty, see Güterbock 1969; with death, see Otten 1958; Kassian, Korolëv, and Sidel'tsev 2002.
27. Beckman 1999b.
28. *KUB* 41.8 iv 29–32 (CTH 446).
29. Beckman 1993.
30. Hoffner 1988.
31. Archi 1979.
32. Kassian, Korolëv, and Sidel'tsev 2002, pp. 382–85.
33. van den Hout 1995.
34. For further details, see Beckman forthcoming b.
35. ^dUTU(-u/um/i/e); van Gessel 1998, pp. 844–99.
36. See Kutter 2008.
37. Indeed, this term seems on occasion to be used by Hittite scribes to indicate any male deity whose precise character is unknown to them.
38. Klinger 1996, pp. 141–47.
39. For the female deity as Wurunšemu, see *ibid.*, pp. 145–46; cf. Soysal 2004, p. 325; as sun goddess of Arinna, see Yoshida 1992, p. 150.
40. *KUB* 21.19 i 4 (CTH 383); illustrated in Bittel 1976a, pls. 23, 24. Note in this connection *KUB* 38.37 iii 13–14 (CTH 295), which reads, "Thus says Zuwa: 'The Sun-goddess of Arinna of our grandfather is a solar disk of gold.'"
 41. *taknaš* ^dUTU. In this role she would later be identified with the Hurrian Allani.
 42. For Šamaš's transit, see Polonsky 2002; it is uncertain whether this idea ultimately originated in Mesopotamia. For Eštan's crossing, see Heimpel 1986.
 43. See Klinger 1996, p. 143. The male solar deity is first attested in the Akkadian version of the Annals of Hattušili I (CTH 4); see Houwink ten Cate 1987, p. 15. Note that where the Akkadian version of the text mentions the male Sun-god, the Hittite-language rendering is ^dUTU ^{URU}Arinna.
 44. On the twelfth day of the *šalliš waštaiš* ritual, offerings are made to both ^dUTU and *taknaš* ^dUTU-uš. See Kassian, Korolëv, and Sidel'tsev 2002, pp. 476–77.
 45. *KUB* 35.45 ii 25–27 (CTH 760); Starke 1985, p. 153.
 46. See West 2007, pp. 194–217, for the common features of the Indo-European solar deity.
 47. Kloekhorst 2008, pp. 763–64, 766–67.
 48. See Trémouille 2000, p. 124. At Ugarit, the solar deity *Špš* was female.
 49. Heimpel 1986; Steinkeller 2005.
 50. Lines 374–79; translated by Steinkeller 2005, p. 18, n. 17.
 51. Güterbock 1978, pp. 138–39.
 52. CTH 372–74; see Güterbock 1958; Güterbock 1978; Güterbock 1980.
 53. For a full translation, see Beckman 2009, pp. 245–49.
 54. For the Akkadian hymn, see CTH 792; cf. *KAR* 1.19; for the Sumerian-Akkadian hymn (CTH 794), see J. Cooper 1972; on the viziers of Šamaš and Babylonian duplicate (CTH 793), cf. *OECT* 6, pp. 51ff.; see also Richter 1999, p. 297.
 55. For Šamaš's concern for swine and canines, see *KUB* 6.45 iii 15–16 (CTH 381); Singer 1996, pp. 20, 39; perhaps this topos is simply an elaboration of the deity's concern for beasts in general. For Helios, see Pfister 2002, p. 30; for this conception of solar movement, see West 2007, pp. 210–11; for the earliest datable depictions of a deity aboard a chariot, see Mellink 1966, p. 83.