For purposes of the following discussion I subsume under the notion “myth” narratives about deities and/or humans in a past that lies beyond direct knowledge and describes extraordinary events (cf. Haas 2006). One may choose to limit “myth” to those stories that involve deities (e.g. Beckman 1993-97) and classify those with exclusively human actors as “legends” or the like. However, the often fragmentary nature of our evidence and the undeniable belief of the Hittites themselves in the routine intervention of deities in human affairs make such a distinction hard to maintain. For a thoughtful discussion of this problem apropos of one Hittite text see Gilan 2008. I will return briefly to the problem of definition and classification in my conclusion. Translations of most of the texts mentioned here are available in Italian in Pecchioli Daddi and Polvani 1990 and in English in Hoffner 1998 (the latter being more inclusive). These two works also discuss with varying degrees of detail the nature of the respective compositions—discussions that should be compared with others cited below.

Our sources for Hittite myth are limited to the archives of the royal/imperial bureaucracy, whose records include royal annals, treaties, protocols (i.e., instructions regulating the behavior of state officials), the state cult, rituals, and
scholastic texts for scribal instruction. For us, then, Hittite myth not only exists exclusively in written form, but also has been selectively filtered in that the extant texts must have had some relevance for the governing bureaucracy. Any possible relationship of mythical narratives to an oral tradition among the “common people” can only be surmised. As defined, Hittite mythological texts fall into three distinct categories according to their role or function in state affairs.

The first group consists of myths ascribed to the Hattians, the autochthonous pre-Indo-European inhabitants of Central Anatolia. The core of the content of these Hattic myths undoubtedly is native Anatolian, but there likely has been some admixture of inherited Indo-European elements in the form in which they are presented to us in the Hittite texts. These Hattic myths form an integral part of state religious festivals, i.e. regularly performed rituals to maintain the integrity and prosperity of society, or of rituals performed to resolve crises. As rightly formulated by Beckman (1993-97: 565): “The primordial event memorialized in the text served as a paradigm for the resolution of a parallel contemporary problem.”

We have one such myth whose status as part of a fixed state ritual is assured: the “Myth of Illuyanka” (on which see in addition to the works cited above also Watkins 1992 and 1995: 448-59, Katz 1998, and Haas 2006: 97-103). This myth describes the battle of the Storm-god (chief deity in the Hattic-Hittite pantheon) with an eel-snake dwelling in a watery pit (Katz 1998: 324-25). The latter initially
wins, but the Storm-god prevails with the aid of a human who perishes due to his intimate relationship with the deity.

This myth is part of the *furulli* festival of Nerik, a spring festival performed to assure and celebrate the annual renewal of the natural world. See the discussion by Haas and the text opening (KBo 3.7 i 5-8): *utne-wa māu šešdu nu-wa utnē paḫšanuwan ėšdu nu mān māi šešzi nu EZEN pʏrulliya ĭyanzi* ‘“Let the land grow and prosper! Let the land be protected!”’ In order that (it) grow and prosper, they celebrate the *p.*-festival.’

The most famous of the Hattic myths is that of the “disappearing god” (Haas 2006: 103-115), which follows a set plot line: a deity retreats in anger, refusing to perform his or her vital functions, leading to drastic dysfunction in the cosmos (or a part thereof) and the need to induce the deity to return and resume his or her

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1 My translation follows that of Pecchioli Daddi and Polvani 1990: 50 after Stefanini against that of Hoffner et al. The more usual translation ‘If/when (it) grows and prospers, they celebrate the *p.*-festival’ makes no sense in context, since the fixed annual celebration does not depend on the prosperity of the land, but according to the Hittite belief rather the opposite. Hittite does not have a regular construction for “final clauses”, but *mān* may be read here as the particle used to express desire. Thus more literally: ‘Would that (it) grow and prosper, (for that) they perform the *p.*-festival.’
functions. Recitation of the myth (adapted to the case of the specific deity) is accompanied by both divine and human propitiatory rituals and by verbal evocation of the deity. The Hittite term for this ritual type is mūgawar, the verbal noun of mūgā(i)- ‘to induce to action’ (thus with Laroche 1964: 20-24, against all others). The best-known version of the myth is for Telipinu (Hattic for ‘great son’, i.e. of the Storm-god), whose absence leads to widespread famine and sterility, but we have fragments of multiple versions, and there is yet no proven association with a fixed state festival (pace Haas 2006: 104).

A third Hattic myth known as “When the Moon Fell from the Sky” (Haas 2006: 120-22) is to be performed ‘when the Storm-god thunders frightfully’. The very fragmentary documentation of this myth leaves its connection with ritual use not fully clear. Per Beckman (1993-97: 565), textual variations in the Hattic myths suggest that they are based on an oral tradition, but it is doubtful that they show any metrical structure. For a different view on the latter point see Haas 2006: 102&105, following deVries.

The second major group of Hittite myths consists of those borrowed (or more accurately adapted) from various Near Eastern sources. I follow Beckman (1993-97: 565) in regarding these as essentially belletristic literature used for the instruction of scribes and perhaps for the entertainment of the Hittite court. These texts may to some extent be subcategorized by source, but this classification must be regarded as provisional for many of the compositions.
Some of the myths are clearly Mesopotamian in origin. The famous story of Gilgamesh is attested in the Hittite archives in both an Akkadian version and a Hittite version based on a Hurrian intermediary. It is clear from the content of the latter despite its fragmentary condition that it is a free adaptation, not a translation. We also find (unfortunately even more fragmentary) manuscripts of the Atrahāsīs (which includes a flood narrative) and the story of Gurparanzah (a tale of the city of Akkad, the Tigris, and the eponymous hero). Both of these are in Akkadian with a Hittite translation.

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

Most extensive among the myths adapted by the Hittites are those based on Hurrian precursors. It must be emphasized, however, that the Hurrians are assured only to be the immediate source of transmission to the Hittites. The ultimate origins of the various myths are uncertain and subject to vigorous debate. The largest set of such texts is the “Kumarbi Cycle”, which tells of a multi-generational divine struggle for the kingship of heaven. Its many shared features with Hesiod’s theogony surely reflect a Near Eastern, not Indo-European source.
These texts are labeled “songs” in their Hittite versions and almost certainly are in verse (see McNeill 1963, Durnford 1971, Melchert 1998).

The Hurro-Hittite “Song of Release” is an etiological story of the destruction of Ebla (a powerful city state of Syria in the 3rd-2nd millennia that was destroyed ca. the 16th century BCE). On the interpretation of this text (editio princeps Neu 1996) see now Wilhelm 2001 and Bachvarova 2005ab with references. It is not yet clear whether this composition is also in verse. Also among the Hurro-Hittite myths belongs the story of Kešši, the hunter.

The third set of myths represents myth in the guise of prehistory. This type is based on the widespread Hittite practice of justifying and motivating current political policy based on past events. Such historical narratives are found in preambles to treaties, both parietal and non-parietal, in the so-called “apology” of Hattusili III, in the text of Mursili II on the “tawananna affair”, and others (for translations of the passages in treaties see Beckman 1996). A desire in some instances to relate the relevant facts “from the beginning” led beyond the two to three generations available to direct memory and hence a resorting to what we from our perspective would regard as myth.

The clearest example of this sort is the “Zalpa Narrative” (translation in Hoffner 1998: 81-2). The extant text first presents a story of prodigious multiple births, exposure of infant boys in baskets on a river and their divine rescue, and brother-sister incest. After a significant lacuna we find a few lines referring to the
Sun-god (including direct speech by him), followed directly by the beginning of a prosaic historical narrative involving the ‘grandfather of the king’. There can be no doubt that the two parts of the text form a single composition. Interpretations diverge widely (see Watkins 2004, Gilan 2007, and Zorman 2008, and the respective references to still other analyses). What seems clear is that the text is an attempt to account for an historically attested hostility between Hattusha (the Hittite capital) and Zalpa, a city on Black Sea coast with which there existed some kind of complex (possibly ethnic) pre-historical relationship.

A second example is “The Bull with the Crumpled Horn”, an etiological story of the crossing of the Taurus Mountains (Otten 1963). There are surely further examples in texts describing early encounters with the Hurrians (aptly characterized by Laroche 1971: 4 as “récits légendaires”) and possibly in the so-called “cannibal text” (Haas 2006: 51-54 and Gilan 2008). See also the unassigned *historiola* and mythologems collected by Haas (2006: 237-44 and passim). As already noted by Haas (2006: 20), the line between “myth” and “history” is often blurred. The Zalpa text suggests that the distinction may have been non-existent for Hittites. Compare Munn (2006: 302-10) on a similar blurring in Herodotus.

We are thus brought back face-to-face with the problem of how we are to define “myth”. It should be obvious that the threefold classification I have just offered rests entirely on a modern viewpoint, as does the overall selection of
compositions to be considered (the latter, I emphasize, generally follows others and is not original with me). It is unlikely that the Hittites themselves perceived the same commonalities among the three types that we do—or at least that they regarded such features from the same perspective. As in the case of trying to classify Hittite “literature”, however, we unfortunately have very little basis for inferring the Hittites’ own contextualization of this material. I forgo here any mere speculation in this regard.
References


——. 2005b. The Eastern Mediterranean Epic Tradition from *Bilgames and Akka* to the *Song of Release* to Homer’s *Iliad*. *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 45.131-54.


