

Archiv für Religionsgeschichte

Archiv für Religionsgeschichte

Begründet von

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DE GRUYTER

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ISSN 1436-3038

e-ISSN 1868-8888

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

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Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

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Livio Warbinek

Hittites and Their Oracles: They Believed in Them, Although They Did Not Trust Them

The Hittite Kingdom ruled – with many twists and turns – over large parts of Anatolia, the upper Euphrates and coastal Syria during the 2nd millennium BCE. The Hittites were an Indo-European people known as the “the people of the “Thousand Gods of Hatti”¹, with reference to their religious system based on the adoption of different pantheons and myths and religious practices. In this context, divination was the main means of communication with gods and it was organized on the level of public affairs. This involved the entire kingdom and its people.

The aim of this article is to discuss the uncertainty and doubt in relationships between humans and gods in Hittite oracular practice, caused by the inaccuracy of the divination systems themselves. To achieve a more reliable system, the procedure demanded that different oracles were alternated in order to verify the outcome of previous investigations. Indeed, the Hittite diviners were well aware of the error-prone nature of their predictions given the features of their oracular systems and tried to avoid unforgivable misunderstandings. Their goal was to obtain previously unknown information, prevent incurring divine anger and avoid religious negligence.

1 Preliminary Remarks

In this contribution, my intention is to present the sense of uncertainty detectable in Hittite cuneiform texts, by exploring the nature, frequency and intensity of this uncertainty. The discussion focuses on Hittite oracles in particular, and whether or not the Hittites trusted them. To perform this analysis, the main principles of the Hittite divination techniques are presented revealing doubt and uncertainty around this practice. However, before looking at the Hittite oracles in more detail, it is necessary to take into consideration their field of action. In this regard, Hittite prayers clearly show us the occasions when the oracles were questioned.

The author is the 2018 – 2019 Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology post-doctoral fellow at Tel Aviv University. I wish to thank the organizers Dr. Nicole Hartmann and Dr. Franziska Naether for enabling me to participate in the workshop “The Benefit of the Doubt” held at Humboldt Universität in Berlin. I would like to thank Prof. Amir Gilan who supported me throughout the preparation of this contribution. Any mistakes are of course my own.

1 “*LIM DINGIR*^{MEŠ} ŠA KUR ^{URU}Hatti””. For instance, see KBo 4.10+ i 48 – 49.

2 Oracles in Prayers

Hittites called their prayers *arkueššar/arkuwar*² (see Latin *arguo*, *argumentum*), a juridical term meaning “a defense against an accusation”, or *mugawar*³ “invocation”, which is actually their genre. Literally speaking, Hittite prayers were an invocation to the gods, usually by the king, to forge a relationship between humans and deities in defense of the kingdom and its people.⁴ The prayers of king Muršili II are of special interest due to the critical situation of the kingdom. Muršili II (ca. 1320 – 1295 BCE) assumed the throne after the premature death of his brother Arnuwanda II who, like their father Šuppiluliuma I, fell victim to the plague which ravaged the kingdom for approximately 20 years around 1320 BCE.⁵ It is likely that, Šuppiluliuma’s army unwittingly carried the plague from Syria into the country.⁶ Muršili II, the young new king, therefore, inherited an extensive but weak kingdom, as can be seen from the explanatory words addressed to the Sun-Goddess of Arinna in his prayer KUB 24.3+ (CTH 376):⁷

(§ 6, ii 3’-4’) “O gods, what is that you have done? You have allowed a plague into Hatti (i. e. Hittite Kingdom) and the whole of Hatti is dying.”

(§ 7, ii 14’-22’) “So it has come to pass that the offering of bread, the libations, and the offering of animals have stopped. And you, O gods, proceed to hold the sin against us in that matter. To mankind, our wisdom has been lost, and whatever we do right comes to nothing. O gods, whatever sin you perceive, either let a man of god come [and declare it], or let the old women, [the diviners, or the augurs establish it], or let ordinary persons see it in a dream.”

In two other passages of the so-called Muršili’s Fourth Plague Prayer KUB 14.13 +23.124 (CTH 378.4)⁸ the Hittite king begged the gods for mercy upon his reign, complaining about the apparent inaccuracy⁹ of oracles:

(§ 5, i 47–55) “When my father (i. e. Šuppiluliuma I) went to Egyptian territory, since that day of Egypt, death has persisted in [Hatti], and from that time Hatti has been dying. My father repeat-

² From the verb *arkuwai*- “to pray”, see HW² I/3: 309–310; HEG I: 60–61; HED I: 148–151; IEED 5: 205–206.

³ From the verb *mugai*- “to invoke, evoke”, see HEG 6: 226–228; HED 6: 177–184; CHD M: 319b–322, 324a; IEED 5: 585–586.

⁴ See Torri (2019) 48. For a specific discussion on Hittite prayer and its terminology, see Singer (2002) and Daues/Rieken (2018) 5–11.

⁵ For historical background on the Hittite kingdom between Šuppiluliuma I and Muršili II, see Bryce (2005) 154–207.

⁶ On the historical context surrounding Muršili’s prayers and the plague, see Singer (2002) 47–49.

⁷ Singer (2002) 52. For the Hittite transliteration, see Lebrun (1980) 159–161, and Daues/Rieken (2018) 356–359.

⁸ Singer (2002) 65–66. For the Hittite transliteration see Rieken *et al.*, hethiter.net/:CTH 378.4 (2015sqq.); and Daues/Rieken (2018) 392–397.

⁹ See Maul (2013) 317–318.

edly inquired through the oracles, but he did not find you, O gods, my lords, through the oracles. I have also repeatedly inquired of you through the oracle, but I have not found you, O gods, my lords, through the oracle.”

(§ 9, iv 1–5) “(Or) should I have restored it (i.e. the temple) for [the gods], my lords, from my land, or from my infantry and chariotry? If I should indeed reestablish the gods, since now the members of my household, land, infantry and chariotry keep dying, by what means should I reestablish you, O gods?”

I would like to draw attention to the following points in these cuneiform texts: firstly, a certain degree of doubt arises from the expressions: “Should I ..., if I should ..., so that ...” and “either let a man... or let *someone else*...”¹⁰, which demonstrate that Muršili II was not completely sure about what he should do. In particular, the king was unsure whether to restore the temple or rather re-establish the gods,¹¹ and, if this was the case, how he should do this. Secondly, these prayers refer to repeated consultations with oracles in an effort to solve these pressing issues: “My father/I repeatedly inquired through oracles”, but they were not able to “find the gods” (i.e., their words or wishes) through the oracles. These points lead to two important questions:

1. Skepticism: The king was unsure what to do (“Should I?”), apparently because he was afraid of the contingent situation of the kingdom. Was this due to –or reinforced by– the lack of oracular responses? Did this use of the term *repeatedly* (Hittite *-šk-* iterative) indicate some degree of doubt in the oracles’ reliability?
2. Frequency: Why did the king seek answers from the oracles so many times? To determine the will of the gods? Did he not trust them or, rather, does the high number of inquiries refer only to the Hittite oracular structure as an iterated action?

It is important to note that the plague persisted on and off despite Muršili II repeatedly deferring to oracles; no matter what he did, the plague continued. The reference to different oracular methods should not be read as a sign of skepticism towards oracles, rather as a sign of Hittite uncertainty about the media through which they could speak with their gods. Unfortunately for Muršili II, there was no other known way to find out why the gods were still angry. In fact, it seems likely that Muršili still believed in the oracular power to determine the will of the gods, providing him the right answer. To better understand these points, I feel it is appropriate to briefly summarize the Hittite oracles.

¹⁰ On these phrases and their Hittite adaptation from Babylonian religious concepts, see Metcalf (2011) 173–175; id. (2015) 50–51.

¹¹ It is not clear what is meant by the phrase “to reestablish the gods” (Hittite EGIR-*pa taninu-*, HEG III: 103–104; IEED 5: 827–828), but it probably refers to the religious practice necessary to reconcile or satisfy the gods. In particular, it could be connected with the Hittite and Luwian *dānit-* “stele” (IEED 5: 828) and be related to the refoundation of some cultic object, stele or statue.

3 Hittite Oracles

In the Hittite cultural milieu, oracles were strictly connected with the *do ut des* principle concerning human and divine will.¹² According to Cicero's later definition (*De divin.*, 1.11–12),¹³ all ancient divination methods can be categorized as *omens*, unsolicited signs from the gods (*divinatio naturalis*, e.g. an eclipse), or as *oracles*, a form of communication through which men actively sought information from deities (*divinatio artificiosa*). Oracles, in turn, can be divided according to their communication system into those with a spontaneous language (*auguria oblativa*, e.g. a prophecy or dream) and those with a provocative language (*auguria impetrativa*, e.g., extispicy or augury).¹⁴ In emergency situations, knowledge achieved through *divinatio naturalis* or *auguria oblativa* was not sufficient. The only way to quickly understand the will of the gods was to question them using the specific language of oracles, i.e., *auguria impetrativa*.¹⁵ In this classification, we can recognize the Hittite oracles¹⁶ as *auguria impetrativa*, divining with inspired language. Hittite oracles that were used to decode messages from the gods included extispicy, augury, the “Bed” Oracle, the “*HURRI*-bird” Oracle, the “Snake” Oracle, and the KIN Oracle.¹⁷ Most of these oracular methods were imported from abroad, particularly from Mesopotamia and Syria, whereas others seem to have had local Anatolian origins.¹⁸ Every oracle had its own oracular interpreter (the diviner ^{LÚ}HAL, the augur ^{LÚ}MUŠEN.DÙ or ^{LÚ}IGI.MUŠEN, the Old Woman ^{MUNUS}ŠU.GI, the dream interpreter ^{MUNUS}ENSI).¹⁹ The oracles were usually transcribed upon clay tablets to be preserved in the archives²⁰ so that the scribes could verify the past events reported in the texts. Indeed, oracles had practical purposes: on the one hand the elimination of some fault or impurity (causing divine anger, misfortune, illness or natural disasters etc.) and on the other hand the pursuit

¹² Taracha (2009) 74.

¹³ In turn, back to Plato, *Fedr.* 244/b–d.

¹⁴ See Bottéro (1982) 5–6; Frantz-Szabó (1995) 2013; Orlamünde (1998) 4 with n. 15; Beal (2001) 57; Hout (2003) 118a; Beckman (2010) 27; Fincke (2014) 4–5. Warbinek (2020)) 25 with nn. 2–4.

¹⁵ Taracha (2009) 146.

¹⁶ The Hittite term for oracle was *ariyašeššar*, from the verb *ariya-* “to question (the oracle)”, HW² I/3: 290–297; HEG I: 56–57; HED I: 136–138; IEED 5: 202–203. See Archi (1974) 113 with n. 1; Kammenhuber (1976) 9, 42; Kimball (2000); Haas (2008) 19; Warbinek (2020) 26.

¹⁷ For an introductory reading on Hittite oracles, see Haas (2008) 17–65. See also Archi (1974) 113; Beal (2001) 57–80; Hout (2003) 118b–120; Hazenbos (2003) I 4–6; *id.* (2007) 96; Warbinek (2020) 25–27, 30 Fig. 1, 36–37 with Tab. 1.

¹⁸ See Archi (1974) 131–134; *id.* (1975) 121; *id.* (1982) 279–283; *id.* (1991) 88–89; Kammenhuber (1976) 10; Popko (1995) 82–83; Beckman (1999) 530; Soysal (2000) 115–116; Beal (2001) 76; Hazenbos (2003) I 8; Haas (2008) 19–20; Taracha (2009) 145; Maul (2013); Warbinek (2020) 37 with note 54.

¹⁹ Unfortunately, it is not possible to delineate yet how they performed their oracle as well as their skills and tools. See Beal (2001). Warbinek (2019); *id.* (2020) 36–37.

²⁰ With a broader meaning here. For a discussion of Hittite notions of library and archive, see Francia (2015).

of divine protection or assurance of good things (long life, progeny and prosperity for the king and the kingdom)²¹. Answers could be received only through a peculiar methodology, which I will describe below.

3.1 Oracular Structure

The methodology of a Hittite oracle was based on the combination of two elements: (A) an oracular system that was based on chains of questions, and (B) the system of checking the answers with other oracular methods. We are able to reconstruct this methodology on the basis of the cuneiform tablets preserved and by using the major texts that report all the features we are going to delineate.

3.1.1 The system based on chains of questions was a result of the fact that the oracular structure did not permit diviners open answers. For this reason an oracle consisted of a series of questions, that directly or indirectly suggest the main reason why the oracle itself was performed. They had to be phrased in a way that the gods could give only yes/no answers. Due to this limitation, every single inquiry could be addressed as “be favorable” or “be unfavorable”, thus foreseeing a result based only on favorable/unfavorable choices. (Table 1).²²

Tab. 1. How to ascertain the oracular answer:²³

Inquiry	Result	Answer
“be favorable!”	“favorable”	Yes
+	+	+
“be favorable!”	“unfavorable”	No
+	–	–
“be unfavorable!”	“favorable”	No
–	+	–
“be unfavorable!”	“unfavorable”	Yes
–	–	+

The combination of inquiry and result provided the answer, directly linked to the question (Table 2).

²¹ Warbinek (2020) 95–105.

²² Orlamünde (1998) 4; Beal (2001) 57; *id.* (2003) 207; Hazenbos (2003) I 5, 14; *id.* (2007) 96; Haas (2008) 3–9; Stoneman (2011) 15; Fincke (2014) 9; Warbinek (2020) 41–42.

²³ Similarly, see Orlamünde (2001) 300; Sakuma (2009) I 16.

Tab. 2. KUB 5.5 i 1–9:²⁴

Parts	Transliteration	Translation
Reason	⁽¹⁾ ANA x x x x x EZEN ₄ ITI ^{KAM} karšir ⁽²⁾ <i>nāt šakuwaššar DÛ-anzi</i>	The monthly festival [...] has been forgotten and we will remedy it completely:
Question	⁽³⁾ [...] ⁽⁴⁾ DINGIR ^{LUM} -za KI.MIN	Oh God, ditto (do you agree?)
Formula	⁽⁵⁾ IŠTU ^{MUNUS} ŠU.GI ER. ^{TUM} QATAMMA=- <i>pāt</i>	The same question through the Old Woman:
Inquiry	<i>nu KIN SIG₅-ru</i>	let the KIN (oracle) be favorable!
Oracle	⁽⁶⁾ [...] ⁽⁷⁾ [...] ⁽⁸⁾ [...]	[KIN divination]
Result	⁽⁹⁾ SIG ₅	Favorable.
Answer	/	(Implied:) Yes, the God approves.

As can be imagined from this example above, the forgotten religious festival might have been a grave concern to Hittites. However, the oracular structure here is “positive” in all its components: positive question, favorable inquiry, favorable result, affirmative answer. Again, the comprehension of the answer goes through the combination of inquiry and result in connection with the question.

The main principle of this procedure foresaw a clear question as well as a clear answer based on a yes/no option. At the same time, however, this was obviously a very narrow investigation. To overcome this structural obstacle and in order to facilitate a wider consultation, Hittite oracles would ask a chain of questions in a process of elimination.²⁵ In short, the oracles consisted of “question + answer = new question”, all directly linked to one another, with the aim of narrowing the doubt arising from a purely yes/no system.

3.1.2 Moreover, the mechanism referred to above was reinforced, in turn, by the custom of checking a result by means of another oracular method led by another oracular specialist.²⁶ This is evident from the different question typologies. Indeed, according to Hazenbos’s terminology,²⁷ it is possible to define:

- *Frage*: an open question, which could be direct or indirect as a conditional sentence;
- *Anfangsfrage*: a question at the beginning of an investigation or a topic;

²⁴ See Hazenbos (2003) IV 138, 168–170.

²⁵ Hazenbos (2003) II 1. See also Maul (2013) 319. See also Warbinek (2020) 40–41.

²⁶ For instance, see Beal (2001) and Haas (2008) 17–65. This kind of Hittite specialist would have been an “Old Woman” (^{MUNUS}ŠU.GI, KIN oracle), diviner (^{L⁰}HAL/BÂRÛ, extispicy, “Bed-” and “ĪURRI-bird” oracles) or augur (^{L⁰}MUŠEN.DÛ/ ^{L⁰}IGL.MUŠEN, augury).

²⁷ Hazenbos (2003) II 4; Warbinek (2020) 40–41.

- *Dieselbe Frage*: a question with exactly the same subject as the previous one (usually with a change of oracular method);
- *Neue Frage*: a question with a different topic to the previous one;
- “*Nur-dies?*”-*Frage*: a question used by the oracle staff to get confirmation of the completeness of the previous question(s) and to exclude other possibilities. This definition comes from the phrase “only this” (Hittite *ki=pat*), which was often used in questions of this kind

The yes/no system and the sequence of question typologies²⁸ can be seen in the following well-preserved oracular texts KUB 5.3+ and KUB 5.4+.

3.2 Case Study: KUB 5.3+ and KUB 5.4+

The complementary cuneiform texts KUB 5.3+18.52 and KUB 5.4+18.53 (CTH 563)²⁹ report that these oracles were performed to assure the safety of the Hittite king³⁰ while he was on wintering grounds outside the capital Ḫattuša “by discovering ahead of time any problems that the gods foresee arising, and by ascertaining the correct method of correcting these” (Beal 2003: 207). These tablets are especially suitable for our present purpose because of their good state of preservation with full oracular evidence. The methods chosen in this case are the KIN symbolic oracle and the flesh oracle (i. e. extispicy). The detail of the way they worked is not the main issue here, rather, I would like to draw attention to how they are alternated in order to confute the previous answer.³¹ For this reason, this source is particularly useful to illustrate how the different question types worked, as well as to demonstrate how the chains were built and joined (Table 3).³²

This outline clarifies how the divination worked through chains of questions using different oracular methods. The real aim of this system was to refine – quickly and accurately – every doubt arising from each oracular operation itself.³³ However, this inherent structure was also the reason for doubting the oracular systems themselves. In this regard, it seems that the Hittites did not trust in their own methodology of oracles. Hittites realized the limits of a yes/no option and tried to overcome

²⁸ On the Hittite grammatical construction of these questions, see Hazenbos (2003) V 136–137.

²⁹ See Archi (1975) 141–142; *id.* (1982) 283–293; Beal (2003) 207–211.

³⁰ Probably Tuthaliya IV (ca. 1235–1210 BCE), grandson of Muršili II and nephew of Muwatalli II who fought Ramesses II at the Battle of Qadeš.

³¹ Beal (2001) 80.

³² Other well-preserved texts reporting comparable oracular chains are: KUB 5.1 (Ünal 1974: 32–102; Orlamünde 1998; Beal 1999), KUB 5.5 (Hazenbos 2003, IV 168–182), KUB 5.7 (Hazenbos 2003, IV 139–157; Tognon 2004, 59–81) and KUB 16.16 (Hout 1998, 138–141). Beal 1999 after Orlamünde 1998 (in brackets in relation to KUB 5.1)

³³ Hazenbos (2003) II 18.

Tab. 3. KUB 5.3+18.52, i 23–63, ii 1–18. (Translation follows Beal (2003) 209–210.)

Chain	Question Type	Lines	Questions	Inquiry	Result	Answer
1	Anfangsfrage	i 23–25	“Since a road accident was ascertained for His Majesty, is this accident due to the anger of some deity?”	Let the flesh oracle (i. e. extispicy) be unfavorable!”	favorable	= No
1b	Dieselbe Frage	i 26–29	“The same question through the Old Woman.	Let the symbol oracle be unfavorable!”	favorable	= Yes
A new question changes the focus of the problem:						
2	Neue Frage	i 30–31	“Will the road accident happen to His Majesty due to the negligence of a person?”	Let the flesh oracle be unfavorable!”	unfavorable	= Yes
2b	Dieselbe Frage	i 32–33	“The same question through the Old Woman.	Let the symbol oracle be unfavorable!”	unfavorable	= Yes
When a new topic is introduced, a new <i>Anfangsfrage</i> appears and the system starts to work forward:						
3	Anfangsfrage	i 42–49	“This year His Majesty proposes to winter in Ḫattuša. If, while His Majesty is up in Ḫattuša, there will not be an epidemic [...],	let the symbol oracle be favorable!”	unfavorable	= No
3b	Dieselbe Frage	i 50–53	“The same question through the diviner.	Let the first flesh oracle be favorable and let the second be unfavorable!”	unfavorable*	= Yes
4	Neue Frage	i 54–57	“Concerning an epidemic that was ascertained to occur up in Ḫattuša [...], is some deity going to cause the plague up in Ḫattuša?”	Let the symbol oracle be unfavorable!”	unfavorable	= Yes
4b	Dieselbe Frage	i 58–63	“If the plague up in Ḫattuša within the year [...],	let [the symbol oracle be u]nfavorable!”	favorable	= No
A new question goes in depth about the anger of a god causing that plague:						
5	Neue Frage	ii 1–4	“Since the anger of a god was ascertained to be the cause of the plague, will some new deity be causing the plague up in Ḫattuša?”	Let the symbol oracle be unfavorable!”	unfavorable	= Yes
6	“Nur-dies?”-Frage	ii 5–8	“If <i>only</i> a new deity and not also some other deity will be causing the plague up in Ḫattuša,	let the symbol oracle be favorable!”	unfavorable	= No
7	Neue Frage	ii 9–12	“Will it be some Hittite god <i>also</i> causing the plague up in Ḫattuša?”	Let the symbol oracle be unfavorable!”	unfavorable	= Yes

Tab. 3. KUB 5.3+18.52, i 23–63, ii 1–18. (Translation follows Beal (2003) 209–210.) (Continued)

Chain	Question Type	Lines	Questions	Inquiry	Result	Answer
8	“Nur-dies?”-Frage	ii 13–18	If it will be <i>only</i> a new deity and the Hittite gods who will be causing the plague up in Ḫattuša [...],	let the symbol oracle be favorable!”	favorable	= Yes

* The result of a flesh oracle could be formed by combining the “first” and “second” *exta*. See Beal (2001) 63–64.

this by checking every answer with more refined questions. To achieve a more reliable system, the procedure required different oracular techniques (extispicy, augury, etc.) to be alternated in order to verify the previous method. In this respect, the Hittite oracular text tradition had three formulations for the introduction of a confirmation:

- Akkadographically: *ER*.^{TUM 34} *QATAMMA*, “the same question”, “the question (is) the same”³⁵
- Sumerographically: *KI.MIN*, “ditto”, “in the same way”³⁶
- Hittite: *menahhanda/IGI-anda hanza/SAG.KI-anza*, “a confirmation as a countercheck”³⁷

The last formula is particularly attested in KUB 5.4 i 11:³⁸

[*nu IGI*]-*an-da SAG.KI-an-za ap-pa-an-na-aš KIN ti-ya-u-en nu KIN SIG₅-ru*

“[So] we placed the KIN symbols of [confir]mation as a countercheck: Let the KIN oracle be favorable!”

Having described the oracular structure and its mechanism according to the cuneiform evidence, it is possible to understand their implications for the uncertainty of oracular investigations.

34 Abbreviation for the Akkadian *ERİŠTU(M)* “request, wish”, CAD E: 298–300. See Beal (1992) 129; Schul (1994) 88–89.

35 For example, KUB 49.14 Rev. 12’: *IŠ-TU MUNUSŠU.GI ER*.^{TUM} *QA-TAM-MA-pát nu KIN SIG₅-ru* “Through the Old Woman the same question: Let the KIN symbolic oracle be favorable!”, see Mouton (2007) 204; Warbinek (2020) 38–39.

36 For example, KUB 22.66 Rev. 10’: *nu-kán BAL-an-za-ki-iz-zi KI.MIN nu KIN SIG₅-ru* “and so, the sacrifice will be performed. Ditto, the KIN symbolic oracle be favorable!”, see Mouton (2007) 236–237; Warbinek (2020) 38–39.

37 Lit. “once more/again a countercheck”, HW² III/1, 193b; HED III: 92. See Archi (1975) 148–149; Beal (2001) 80–81; Hout (2003) 122a; Haas (2008) 22; Warbinek (2020) 43.

38 See Archi (1975) 149; Beal (2003) 207.

4 What Were the Hittites Afraid of?

According to the oracular questions, it is possible to extract information concerning the reasons that prompted an oracular investigation. Generally, Hittite oracular texts “intended to discover why something bad has happened. [...] Questions would then be posed to discover what sort of restitution, compensation, punitive damages, prayers, and so on were required to satisfy the deity and quit his/her anger.” (Beal 2001: 58). In this regard, the uncertainty does not relate to the existence and will of the gods, but rather human error, especially mistakes made during the divine service in the temple, in rituals or festivals.³⁹ The guilty parties, therefore, involved humans, that is, the Hittite king, his relatives, his court, his attendants or his officials.⁴⁰ Although the Hittite people did not play any active role, they were affected by royal decisions and the implication of this disregard seems to have been a threat to the whole community. We can clearly see it in passages from another prayer by king Muršili II to the Sun-Goddess of Arinna (KUB 24.3+):⁴¹

(§ 7, ii 11’-16’) “The cowherds and shepherds [...] and sheepfolds from which they used to select sacrificial cattle and sheep are dead, [...]. So it has come to pass that the offering of bread, the libations, and the offering of animals have stopped. [...]”

(§ 7, ii 26’-34’) “The protectorates which are round about, Mittanni, and [Arzawa], are all in conflict, and they do not respect [the gods]. They have transgressed the oath of the gods. [...] Turn the plague, the hostility, the famine, and the severe fever towards Mittanni and Arzawa.”

(§ 7, ii 49’-50’) “But now, all the surrounding lands have begun to attack Hatti!”

Here, the Hittite king was trying to point out how the consequences of the plague impacted adversely upon the gods by preventing the Hittites from making divine sacrifices necessary to feed the gods, and also upon Hittite land under attack by several enemies. The kingdom was suffering because of this situation, while its king was begging for mercy in an attempt to prove his loyalty to the gods.

5 Conclusions

In this contribution, my intention was to show how the communication between Hittites and their gods reveals different degrees of uncertainty. These doubts can be seen in the simple word of a king’s prayer as well as in the structure of an oracular investigation. Of course, these sources differ in nature and have a different timeline: a prayer by the king seems to indicate a high level of urgency in this specific context,

³⁹ See Warbinek (2020) 99–100.

⁴⁰ See Warbinek (2020) 100–102.

⁴¹ Singer (2002) 52–53. For the Hittite transliteration, see Lebrun (1980) 159–161, and Daues/Rieken (2018) 356–361.

whereas oracles could be performed *ad libitum* when necessary, according to different circumstances. However, they both put the emphasis in this debate on the Hittite uncertainty towards their beliefs.

According to the textual evidence regarding Hittite oracles, some points can be summarized as follows. First, the oracular iterated practice does not necessarily prove an emergency situation, but concerns only the oracular structure itself and the human doubt associated with interpreting the gods' will. In line with this, the uncertainty among the Hittites was the result of their own inability to clearly understand the will of their gods and to take good care of their divine affairs (festivals, sacrifices, etc.). Second, Hittite doubt is an inherent component of the Hittite divination and it focused on the reliability of a single oracle. They would repeat questions and inquiries, combing through every single answer and thereby revealing to us their doubts in a flawed system. Third, this doubt should not be connected to discrediting the divine world. Rather, this kind of doubt was addressed towards both the oracular structure itself and the human ability to read the signs correctly. Moreover, the Hittites could not doubt the reliability of their oracular system *in toto* since there was no other known way of getting information from the gods. For them the prevailing system seems to have been the only imaginable and possible means of divine human communication.

In this respect, there is no reason to doubt the Hittites' faith in the gods. What they actually doubted was their means of understanding the divine messages and achieving divine knowledge. Their aim was to get as much certainty as possible from the oracles, yet they did not place their full trust in them.

Abbreviations

CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, Chicago, 1956ss.
CHD	Chicago Hittite Dictionary, Chicago, 1980ss.
CTH	E. Laroche, Catalogue des textes hittites, Paris, 1971.
HED	J. Puhvel, Hittite Etymological Dictionary, Berlin/NewYork, 1984ss.
HEG	J. Tischler, Hethitisches etymologisches Glossar. Innsbruck, 1971ss.
HW ²	J. Friedrich and A. Kammenhuber, Hethitisches Wörterbuch. Zweite Auflage, Heidelberg, 1975ss.
IEED 5	A. Kloekhorst, Etymological Dictionary of the Hittite Inherited Lexicon, Leiden, 2008.
KUB	Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi, Berlin, 1921ss.

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