**D. The ‘dying and rising god’ in a text of North-Western Semitic origin**

In the Hittite capital of Ḫattuša, many texts have been found that reflect non-Anatolian traditions, including those originating in Syria and the Levant. Some of these traditions made their way to Ḫattuša following the expansion of Hittite hegemony in Syria in the second half of the second millennium BCE, when the Hittite culture had absorbed local elements. Other traditions arrived indirectly, mediated by the Hurrian kingdom of Kizuwatna, located in Cilicia—between Hatti, Mittani and the cities of northern Syria—which witnessed the settlement of many cults from Syrian cities such as Aleppo and Allalaḫ (Mukiš). Following the annexation of Kizuwatna to Hatti at the end of the 15th century BCE, Syrio-Hurrian traditions also made their way to Hatti. [[1]](#footnote-2)The composition discussed below, *The Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu and the Storm-God*, which was found in three different fragmentary manuscripts, belongs to these groups of texts.[[2]](#footnote-3)

***The Myth of*** ***Elkunirša, Ašertu and the Storm-God* (CTH 342.1)**

In terms of literary genre, the work in question is defined as *historiola*: A mythic story culminating with a ritual that is linked to a particular section of the plot. The first part of the story in this work is known in the research literature both because it has survived relatively intact, and because its content and protagonists are reminiscent of other texts from the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean Basin. The text recounts how Ašertu tried to seduce the Storm-God, but he refused her advances and told her husband, Elkunirša, about it. The latter instructed the Storm-God to be cruel to Ašertu, and he thereby told her that he, the Storm-God, has killed all her sons, whom she mourned for seven years. It is further narrated that while Ašertu and Elkunirša were preparing for sleep, Elkunirša instructed his wife to do to the Storm-God as she pleased (apparently in response to the Storm-God’s actions). The Storm-God’s goddess ally heard this, and immediately flew to him to warn him not to drink wine with Ašertu. Henceforth the text is very broken, but its fragments reveal the events surrounding the Storm-God, who is eventually punished, probably by Ašertu. This punishment will be our main concern. At the end of the story, instructions are given for performing a purification ritual against sorcery, in relation to the aforementioned punishment.

The text is written in Hittite, but several characteristics indicate its north-western Semitic origin. First, two of the story’s protagonists are the Levantine gods, *ˀl-qn-ˀrṣ* and *Aṯrt*, who in the Hittite writing system—which reflects Canaanite pronunciation—became Elkunirša and Ašertu. [[3]](#footnote-4) Second, the number of sons of Ashera in this historiola derives from the round number 70; the same number of the sons of Aṯirat in the Levantine literature. [[4]](#footnote-5) However, since the composer sought to enumerate the sons of Aṯirat in parallelism[[5]](#footnote-6):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | “I killed [yo]ur 77 [children], |
|  | I killed 88” |

He used the number 77/88, just as the Ugaritic scribe did in relation to the 77/88 siblings of Baal. In both cases, it is a variant form of the Levantine theme of “70 gods,” stylized in a graded numerical pattern. [[6]](#footnote-7) Third, the presence of an unusual word in the text that is not at all suitable for the context, also reveals the north-western Semitic origin of the myth: According to the story, a goddess ally of the Storm-God referred to by the logogram IŠTAR, is able to hear Elkunirša’s words to his wife, after he had transformed her into a cup. However, the description of IŠTAR as a cup does not align with the parallelism in which the word “cup” appears—a parallelism whose second part describes the goddess as a particular type of bird—nor is it logical to the subsequent development, when IŠTAR is flying to a desert as a bird, as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 10Ištar heard those words. |  |
| 11She became a cup in the hand of Elkun[irša]. |  |
| 12She became an owl,?[[7]](#footnote-8) |  |
| 13And she sa[t] on his wall… |  |
| 18Ištar f[le]w like a bird ov[e]r the stepp[e], |  |
| 19and found the storm-god in the steppe. |  |

Hoffner proposed to resolve this inconsistency (the parallelism between a cup and a bird), in that the cup is in fact a poor translation of a western Semitic origin. According to his argument, the western Semitic origin of the story tells how the goddess became a bird of prey named “Kȏs.” However, since the meaning of the word “Kos” in Canaanite languages may be both cup and the name of a raptor (and note: this pronunciation is correct only in the dialects in which the Canaanite replica occurred), the Hittite or Hurrian writer erred, choosing the wrong meaning of this word: cup. Hoffner’s proposal, although not accepted by all, best explains the reason for the goddess’s unusual description in this scene.[[8]](#footnote-9)

These and other elements indicate that the historiola of *Elkunirša, Ašertu and the Storm-God* is based on a north-western Semitic source.[[9]](#footnote-10) On the other hand, the ritual at the close of the historiola—that purifies the Storm-God as well as the patient (see below)—probably also involves Hurrian and Mesopotamian elements. [[10]](#footnote-11) In light of this, although it is probable that the entire text came to Hatti via Hurrian mediation, [[11]](#footnote-12) there is no evidence in the historiola itself that indicates the influence of such a mediator.

Returning to the plot of *Elkunirša Ašertu and the Storm-God*, before the great crack in the tablet it is written that the goddess ally of the Storm-God flew to meet him in the steppe,[[12]](#footnote-13) and warned him against drinking wine along with Ašertu. Yet in the next column in the panel (column 3), from which only a few lines have survived, it already appears that Ašertu has apparently managed to punish the Storm-God, and he descended to the netherworld, where he suffered pain in every part of his body. His ally the goddess lamented his condition and asked the gods of the netherworld (“the sons of Anunnaki”) [[13]](#footnote-14) why living beings were being sent there:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 31Ištar began to speak to the ne[therworld deities…]: |  |
| 32“If/when [...] |  |
| 33[...] …[...his] masculinity, muscles, tendons [...] |  |
| 34[...is f]ilthy[[14]](#footnote-15) […]… |  |
| 37Why did [...] send the living ones into the [nether]world?” [...] |  |
| 39seized the body of the storm-god (and his) calves like a snake [...] |  |

The next two fragments in our possession (also from column 3) describe how an unknown figure descended to the place of the Storm-God, who was then healed and re-created with the help of the mother-goddesses and two human healers. The origin of the first healer is Amurru while that of the second is partly obscured by a break, but he may have come from the Ḫana tribes, who like the toponym Amurru also attest to the sorcerer’s western Semitic origin[[15]](#footnote-16):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 53[...] went down to the [sto]rm-god. [..] |  |
| 55[The mothe]r-goddesses to him [...] |  |
| 56[They r]ecreated [the Storm-god…] |  |
| 57like […] they made perfect.[[16]](#footnote-17) |  |
| 58To the storm-god [...] the exorcists [...] A man from Amurru, a man from Ana[...] (and) the head of the exorcists [...] |  |
| 59[They] exor[cized] him [and purified him] from perjury, off[ense, sin, evil] words [...] |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | 60The body of the storm-god [...] pu[re...] |
|  | 61Ištar [said] to [...:] |
|  | 62“[...] the storm-god bac[k[[17]](#footnote-18) ...] |
|  | 63and from the nether[world…”] |

The historiola (column 4) culminates with the debut of the purification ritual against witchcraft, which is directly linked to the description of the bodily injuries that that Storm-God endured in the historiola and their subsequent healings:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | 78when [an evil?[[18]](#footnote-19)] man […]… |
|  | 80From [his/her head he took] a hair. |
|  | 81[From h]is/[h]er [eyes he] took seeing. |
|  | 82[From his/her ears he] took hearing. |
|  | 83[From his/her…] he took [..] |
|  | 84Fro[m his/her… he to]ok [...] […] |
|  | 86[Fro]m his body [he took…] |

The connection between the ritual and the state of the Storm-God indicates that for the author of the ritual, the crux of the historiola is the part that tells about the Storm-God’s descent to the netherworld and his subsequent rise upon being healed. Thus the author of the ritual connected the story of *Elkunirša Ašertu and the Storm-God* and the purification ritual.

While due to the fragmentary state of the text, the end of the historiola may appear secondary to its beginning; it turns out that not only is it an integral part of the entire plot, but is its central element.

It can therefore be assumed that the myth of *Elkunirša, Ašertu and the Storm-God*, whose provenance is distinctly north-western Semitic (but not Ugaritic), is connected, on the basis of the mythology of descent into the netherworld and ascension from it, to the story’s earlier section of Ashera’s treachery and her anger at Storm-God – all well-known motifs from western Semitic literature.[[19]](#footnote-20) Unfortunately, the details of the descent to, and ascent from, the netherworld, which constitute the bulk of the historiola, are not accessible to us today due to the fragmentary state of the text. Its existence, however, is sufficient to outline the path of the spread of the mythology from the Levantine coast, through Syria to the capital of the Hittites.

1. 2Another text reminiscent of Elkunirša, CTH 342.2, was initially considered to be a different version of this myth (hence some articles mention several editions of the Elkunirša myth), but today it is generally assumed that this is a separate ritual, which also incorporates Hurrian gods; cf. Dijkstra 2016. The myth in question also features Hurrian characteristics in the ritual section, but in the narrative section it is difficult to find such characteristics (but cf. Singer 1997), and see more below ... [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. On El-qn-ˀrṣ in the western Semitic literature of the first millennium BCE, see for example Gen 14 and KAI 26A. The meaning of the term is: El, Creator of the Earth. It should be noted that the pronunciation of *kuni* in the Hittite form of the name may reflect the Canaanite shift in the participle form (*qōni* instead of *qāni*) as evidenced by al-Amarna’s manuscripts from the same period. The names of the other two gods–the Storm-God and his goddess ally–are written in the text in question (similar to many other Hittite texts) using the logogram d10 and dIŠTAR, with Hittite phonetic complements indicating that they were probably called by their Hittite names Tarhun and Anzili, respectively. Although many modern translations refer to these gods by their western Semitic names Baal and Anat-Astart, it is probable that in the present Hittite version these gods were not so named. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. On the seventy sons of Asherah—the number of the gods in the western Semitic pantheon—see Ayali-Darshan 2015, with a previous bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. As Hoffner rightly noted in 1965, a number of parallelisms in this prosaic text that attest to its poetic origin have survived (Unlike Ugaritic and Mesopotamian literature, the Hittite literature we have is written in prose). The translation below of *Elkunirša*, *Ašertu* and the *Storm-God* follows… [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. For the graded rhyme and the use of numbers in this rhyme, see.... [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Haas translates *ḫapupi* as “swallow.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. For kôs, see Lev 11:17; Deut 14:16; Ps 10:27. The word “ks” exists in other Semitic languages, but as mentioned, only in the languages where the Canaanite shift applies is there a homonymous identity.  [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Another motif of western Semitic origin that spread to other cultures in the Mediterranean - which is reflected in texts from Egypt (pD'Orbiney), Israel (Gen 37-50) and Greece (Iliad 6, Bellerophon Euripides - Hippolytus), is the motif of “the seductive woman and the refusing youth.” However, the wide distribution of this motif on the shores of the Middle East has led to controversy over its origin, often while//by adding irrelevant stories. E.g.... Attention must also be paid to the motif of Ašertu’s seven years of mourning, to the description of the hostility between the Storm-God and Aṯirtu, and to the representation of El as a Canaanite figure that accedes to every demand; all of these are familiar in Ugaritic literature, but it is difficult to ascertain their origin. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. These rituals are close in many respects to the Hurrian ritual translated into Hittite, attributed to the old woman Allaituraḫi of Muki. For a renewed discussion of the origin of the ritual traditions of Allaituraḫi of Mukiš ... For the Mesopotamian influence on this type of ritual, see Haas 2007, 32-34. In light of this, although it is probable that the text reached Hatti through Hurrian mediation (cf. Singer 1997), it must be admitted that in the historiola itself there is so far no evidence of the mediator’s influence. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. cf. Singer 1997 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. The Hittite text used the borrowed Akkadian word *huribtu* to denote a desert or a prairie. Singer 1997, 633, n. 13 suggested that its intention was to mark the vast plains of northern Mesopotamia and Syria. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. On the names of the Hurro-Hittite Primeval gods residing in the netherworld as the Mesopotamian Anunnaki, see for example Archi 1990. The present work refers to the gods of the underworld in general, and not necessarily the Primeval gods, and indeed this is how they were translated ... וכך אמנם תרגמו... [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Singer alternatively suggests: “oily,” following CHS S, 49a, s.v.*šakuwant*- B (the translation “filthy” stems from *šakuwant*- A). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Hoffner 1998 alternatively translates: “radiant,” and similarly Haas 2006: “glaenzend.” See a short discussion in CHD ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Hoffner 1998 alternatively suggests: ‘re[created…]. Haas 2006 and hethite.net:/: ‘wie[der]‘. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)