Ritual and Myth in Elkunirša (CTH 342.1)

The Second Part of the Historiola and its Affinities with Northwest Semitic Literature

In the Hittite capital of Ḫattuša, numerous texts reflecting Levantine traditions have been found. Some of these traditions could have made their way to Ḫattuša following the expansion of Hittite hegemony in Syria in the second half of the second millennium BCE. Other Northwestern Semitic traditions may have arrived indirectly, through the kingdom of Kizzuwatna, which absorbed multiple traditions from the surrounding cultures, including the cities of northern Syria, such as Aleppo and Mukiš. Following Hatti’s annexation of Kizzuwatna at the end of the fifteenth century BCE, these traditions likewise spread to Hatti.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The discovery of texts of Northwest Semitic origin outside the Levant, despite the apparent Hittite and Hurrian influences, has significant implications for our understanding of Levantine traditions in several ways. First, in terms of content, they expand our knowledge and understanding of Northwest Semitic literature beyond what is documented in the vernacular languages like Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Second, in terms of chronology, because the texts from Hatti were recorded before those in Northwest Semitic languages, these traditions can be dated back to an earlier period. And third, in terms of dissemination, the Hittite texts shed light on how Northwest Semitic traditions were transmitted in the ancient Near East. This is particularly noteworthy since, unlike the diffusion of Mesopotamian traditions in the second millennium BCE, which is often attributed to the widespread presence of Akkadian scribal schools throughout the region, the transmission of traditions from the periphery to the center is not self-evident and requires further investigation.

To address these issues, the present paper delves into the second part of *The Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm God* (CTH 342.1), which recounts the descent of the storm god into the netherworld and his subsequent ascent, followed by a purification ritual. After providing a brief introduction to the first part of the composition and summarizing the reasons why scholars have concluded that it originates in the Levant, I will shift the focus to its lesser-known final sections.

### 1. A brief introduction to the first part of the myth and its Levantine origin

*The Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm God* is recounted by several fragmentary tablets, originating from apparently three duplicates: A: *KUB* 36.35 (+) *KUB* 36.37 + *KUB* 31.118; B: *KUB* 36.34; and C: *KUB* 12.61.[[2]](#footnote-3) Heinrich Otten first published the text in two studies in 1953, characterizing it as a Canaanite myth.[[3]](#footnote-4) In 1968, Emmanuel Laroche revisited the fragments and published a new edition, which was followed by subsequent scholars, such as Harry A. Hoffner, Gary Beckman, and Volkert Haas.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The beginning of the plot, preserved in the first two columns of the tablets, is well known among modern scholars because it has survived relatively intact and bears a resemblance to other texts from the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean Basin. It narrates that the goddess Ašertu tried to seduce the storm god, but he turned her down and reported her deeds to her husband, Elkunirša. Then, Elkunirša instructed the storm god to sleep with Ašertu and humiliate her, and the storm god therefore told Ašertu that he had killed all her sons, causing her great suffering. She mourned for them for seven years. Later, when Ašertu sought revenge, she won back Elkunirša’s favor, and he advised her to do whatever she pleased with the storm god. Having overheard their evil plan, the goddess who is referred to by the logogram *IŠTAR* rushes to the aid of the storm god, warning him not to drink wine with Ašertu. Henceforth, the text—which, for the sake of convenience, I refer to as the “second part” of the composition—is highly fragmented. Consequently, it has largely been neglected in scholarly research.

Since its publication, scholars have argued that this Hittite text is of Levantine origin, due to the following characteristics that appear in its initial section:[[5]](#footnote-6) Firstly, two of the story’s protagonists are Levantine gods, *ˀl-qn-ˀrṣ* and *ˀṯrt*, whose names become Elkunirša and Ašertu in the Hittite writing system.[[6]](#footnote-7) The pronunciation of *kuni* in the Hittite probably reflects the Canaanite shift of the participle form (*qōni*), as is also manifested in the biblical variant of the name: אֵל עֶלְיוֹן קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ (Gen 14:19).[[7]](#footnote-8)

The other two prominent gods in this text—the storm god and his female ally—are represented by the logograms 10 and *IŠTAR* with Hittite phonetic complements, namely -*ni* and -*iš* (respectively). This suggests that the Hittite scribe read these as the storm god Tarḫun, and probably the goddess Anzili.[[8]](#footnote-9) Although some modern translations refer to these gods by their respective Northwest Semitic names Baal and Anat/Astarte, there is no evidence to support this reading. Therefore, they will be designated here according to their logograms as the storm god (“10”) and *IŠTAR*.

The Northwest Semitic origin of the Hittite text is further suggested by the attribution of seventy sons to Ašertu. This number aligns with the Ugaritic reference to the “seventy sons of Aṯirat” (*šbˁm bn ˀAṯrt*), encompassing the entire pantheon of Ugarit (*KTU* 1.4 VI 46). When the Ugaritic poet referred to these seventy gods in a *parallelismus membrorum*, he used the graded numerical rhyme, as is common in Northwest Semitic poetry.[[9]](#footnote-10) In this case, it would be 77 and 88 gods, as follows (*KTU* 1.12 II):

(48′) *k šbˁt l šbˁm aḫh ym*[*ġyh*]

(49′) *w ṯmnt l ṯmnym*

(48′) When his seventy-seven siblings arr[ive]

(49′) and his eighty-eight (siblings).

Outside of Ugarit, the expression, “seventy gods” (70 DINGIRMEŠ) in reference to the entire pantheon appears in *The* *Song of Ullikummi* (CTH 345; *KUB* 33.106 I 11′), a Hurro-Hittite composition with notable West Semitic features.[[10]](#footnote-11) Similar usage is also observed in the Syrian city of Emar: One of the Emarite texts (*Emar* 373) prescribes the offering of seventy lambs to “all the seventy gods of Emar” (l. 38: 70 DINGIRMEŠ *gabbi* *ša* URUEmar).[[11]](#footnote-12) In two other texts, the order is given to offer seventy doves (*Emar* 463:6) and seventy portions of bread and meat (*Emar 6,* 385:34) to the gods,[[12]](#footnote-13) likely referencing the seventy gods that symbolize the entire pantheon of Emar. Over time, this concept evolved in early Jewish texts into the idea of seventy guardian angels, each assigned to protect a specific nation, totaling seventy (1 Enoch 89:59, cf. 90:22–25).[[13]](#footnote-14)

Akin to Ugaritic poetry, in the *Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm god*, the writer denotes the sons of Ašertu in a *parallelismus membrorum* through the graded numerical rhyme.[[14]](#footnote-15) Thus, when the storm god informs Ašertu that he has killed all her sons, he declares (*KUB* 36.35 I):

(23′) *tuēl=wa=kan* (24′) [DUMUMEŠ-*K*]*A* 77 *kwenun*

88 *kwenun*

(23′–24′) “I killed [yo]ur 77 [children]

(24′) I killed 88.”

As discussed above, this poetic formula presents an alternative form of the “seventy sons of *ˀAṯrt*,” the common number of gods in the Levantine pantheon.

A plausible third indication of the Northwest Semitic origin of the *Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm god* is an irregularity that has been identified in another *parallelismus membrorum.* This is located in the section describing how *IŠTAR*, the storm god’s ally, listened in on the conversation between Elkunirša and Ašertu. According to the first part of the parallelism, she was able to do so by transforming herself into a cup held by Elkunirša (*KUB* 12.61 II):[[15]](#footnote-16)

(6′) d*IŠTAR*-*iš eni* INIMMEŠ *IŠME*

*n=*[(*aš=za=kan ANA* d*Elkun*)*irša*] (7′) ŠU-*i anda* GAL-*iš* DÙ-*at*

(6′) *IŠTAR* heard those words.

(6′–7′) She became a cup in the hand of Elkun[irša].

This seems to be at odds with *IŠTAR*’s transformation into a bird in the second part of the parallelism:

(7′) *ḫa*[(*pupeš=ma=za kišat*)]

(8′) *n=aš=za=kan kutti=šši eša*[(*t*)]

(7′) She became an owl?,[[16]](#footnote-17)

(8′) And she sa[t] on his wall.

However, this transformation into a bird is perfectly consistent with the subsequent lines, depicting *IŠTAR’s* flight over the desert:

(10′) d*IŠTAR*-*i*[*š*]*=ma=*[*ka*]*n* MUŠEN*-iš iwar ḫuripta*[*š*] (11′) *parra*[*nt*]*a p*[*idd*]*aet*

*nu=k*[*a*]*n* d10-*an ḫurip*[(*taš*)](12′) *anda wemiyat*

(10′–11′) *IŠTAR* f[le]w like a bird ov[e]r the stepp[e],

(11′–12′) And found the storm god in the steppe.

Harry A. Hoffner attempted to resolve the inconsistency in the parallelism by interpreting “cup” as a mistranslation of the Semitic word כֹּס (Kȏs), which is the generic name for a certain bird of prey. Since the word כֹּס in Canaanite languages carries both meanings (“cup” and raptor), it is possible that the non-Semitic adaptor erred, choosing the wrong meaning; namely, a cup.[[17]](#footnote-18)

These elements indicate that despite being written in Hittite and referring to some local gods (like the storm god Tarḫun) and local sites (e.g. the Euphrates: ÍD*Mala*),[[18]](#footnote-19) the *Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm God* is based on a Levantine tradition.[[19]](#footnote-20)

### 2. The second part of the *Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm God* and its affinities with Northwest Semitic cultures

The first and more legible part of the text ends when *IŠTAR*, the storm god’s ally, flies to meet him in the steppe (the Semitic loanword *ḫuribtu*)[[20]](#footnote-21) to warn him against drinking wine with Ašertu. The subsequent broken lines reveal that the storm god had eventually been punished, probably by Ašertu, and this relates to his descent to the netherworld. Later, the storm god will be healed and recreated by both divine and human beings, enabling him to return from the netherworld. At the end of this account, instructions are given for performing a purification ritual against witchcraft. These instructions turn the whole myth into a historiola, in terms of its function.

In contrast to the initial part of the myth, the second part—written in the last two columns—incorporates ritualistic terms into the narrative. For instance, the body parts of the storm god in the netherworld are described as impure and “seized,” (*KUB* 36.37 III, 9′, 13′), while his recovery involves a purification from “perjury, offense, sin, and evil words” through exorcism (*KUB* 12.61 III 9′–11′). It appears that as the narrative approaches the ritualistic section, both conceptually and physically, the boundary between myth and ritual becomes blurred, allowing the ritual to contaminate the myth. The resulting ‘amalgam’ and the notably fragmentary state of the tablets render this part more challenging to comprehend than the preceding part of the myth.

Nevertheless, the first and more legible part of the composition, confirming its Levantine roots, enables us to focus on additional elements with a Northwest Semitic background, which are discernible in the second part of the composition. Thanks to the ritualistic elements in this part, the transmission route of this composition can also be inferred. The ensuing discussion reflects the order in which each element appears in the text.

1. “The sons of the Anunaki”

The third column of the text recounts that when the storm god was injured in the netherworld, his ally, the goddess *IŠTAR*, spoke with a group referred to as “the sons of the Anunaki” (*KUB* 36.37 III):

(6′) d*IŠTAR* DUMUMEŠ d*A*-[*NUN-NA-KE*4... (7′)... *memi*]*škiuwan dāiš**mān=ma*[... (8′)...]-*aš*? LÚ-*tar* UZUSA.DUḪI.A UZUSAḪI.A[... (9′)... *š*]*aknuwanza* … […(10′)…]… *kuwat=w*[*a*... (11′) … GE6-*i*] KI-*pi* TI-*anteš wiyat* *nu=z*[*a*… (12′) …] *nu* d10 NÍ.TE-*ŠU* AMARḪI.A MUŠ *mā*[*n*... (13′)...]-*pa*? *ēpta*

(6′) *IŠTAR*, to the sons of the A[nunaki], (7′) began to [spe]ak: […] “If/when [... (8′)... his] penis, muscles, tendons [...(9′)...is imp]ure.[[21]](#footnote-22) … […(10′–11′)…] …Why did [...he/she] send the living ones into the [nether]world?” … [... (12′–13′) …] And he/she seized the storm god, his body (and his) calves, like a snake [...]

The same group is mentioned again in a very fragmentary context, in proximity to Elkunirša (*KUB* 36.35 IV, 5–6): “[…] DUMUMEŠ d*A*-*NUN-N*[*A-KE*4…] d*Elkunirša* […].”

The term Anunaki originated in Sumerian but was used in Hittite compositions in its later Akkadian meaning, referring to the primeval gods who reside in the netherworld.[[22]](#footnote-23) However, the unique phrase “the sons of the Anunaki” does not recur in any other place beyond this work. Since the context points to the same meaning as that of “Anunaki,” the hapax phrase seems to have been borrowed from the Semitic linguistic structure “sons of...” which signifies a particular species, group, or guild, rather than a literal reference to children.[[23]](#footnote-24) This follows the same structure as the designation “sons/daughters of men,” which refers to human beings in Ugaritic (*bn nšm*) and Hebrew (בנות האדם), as well as “sons of prophets,” denoting the guild of prophets in Hebrew (בני הנביאים), or “sons of craftsmen,” referring to the guild of diviners in Akkadian (*mārē* *ummiāni*).[[24]](#footnote-25) In fact, it also corresponds to the designation of gods as “sons of El/God” in Ugaritic (*bn il*(*m*)) and Hebrew (בני אלים), which implies a probable influence on this specific usage of the hapax phrase in the Hittite composition.

1. The mother goddesses

The healing of the storm god starts, according to the extant text, with the descent of an unknown figure who joins him there in the netherworld. The storm god is then recreated, with the help of the mother goddesses and human healers, as per the following (*KUB* 12.61 III):

(2′) [... d1]0-*ni* GAM-*an pait* [… (3′)... DINGI]R.MAḪḪI.A*=ma=šši a-*[... (4′)...d10-*an* E]GIR*-pa šamma*[*nair*... (5′)...]-*ta* *iwar*[...] (6′) ˹*mišriwaḫḫ*˺[*ir*] (7′) d10-*ni* LÚMEŠ *ḫukmatallē*[*š*...] (8′) LÚ URU*Amurri* LÚ URU*Ana*[...] (9′) GAL LÚ.MEŠMU7*n=an ḫu*[*kkeškanzi*] (10′) *linkiyaza ḫara*[*tnaza wašdulaz* ḪUL-*az*] (11′) *memiyannaz* [...] (12′) d10-*aš* NÍ.TE-*aš park*[*u*-...] (13′) d*IŠTAR*-*iš A*˹*NA*˺ [...] (14′) d10-*an=wa* EGI[R-*pa*...] (15′) GE6-*yaza* x[... ]

(2′) [...] went down to the [sto]rm god. [… (3′) …The mothe]r goddesses to him [... (4′) …They r]ecreated [the storm god… (5′) …] like (6′) [… they] made perfect.[[25]](#footnote-26) (7′) To the storm god, the exorcists [...]. (8′) A man from the city of Amurru, a man from the city of Ana[-?...] (9′) (and?) the head of the exorcists.[They] exor[cized] him, (10′) (and) from perjury, off[ense, sin, evil] (11′) words, [they purified him….] (12′) The body of the storm god [...] pu[re...] (13′) *IŠTAR* [said] to [...: “…] (14′) the storm god bac[k[[26]](#footnote-27)...] (15′) and from[[27]](#footnote-28) the nether[world…”].

The mother goddesses, the DINGIR.MAḪḪI.A, who participate in the storm god’s recreation in the netherworld, are mentioned in numerous Hittite texts. Not to be confused with the mother goddess (in the singular form),[[28]](#footnote-29) the group of mother goddesses, together with the group of fate goddesses (the Gulšeš), were perceived as life-giving divine entities responsible for a person’s well-being from birth onwards. The latter role can be exemplified in the following paragraph from the river ritual Bo 3617, I 8′–17′ (CTH 434.1):

If (someone) says (something) to someone else, (and for him) it is terrible, (then) he goes back to you, O river, and to the goddesses the Gulšeš and the DINGIR.MAḪMEŠ of the river bank, those who create man (*antuḫšan kuiēš* *šamnieškanz*[*i*]).[[29]](#footnote-30)

The respective roles of the fate goddesses and the mother goddesses, namely overseeing fate and bestowing life, led Gary Beckman to suggest that these responsibilities were initially separate. The Gulšeš had the responsibility of managing fates, while the DINGIR.MAḪḪI.A were associated with giving life (*šamnāi-*). In support of his assertion, Beckman points to the fact that the Gulšeš are hardly mentioned in birth rituals.[[30]](#footnote-31) This suggestion finds further support in the composition under discussion, according to which the storm god descended to the netherworld and then *appa šamnāi-*, namely, was recreated, by the mother goddesses without the involvement of the Gulšeš.

Since, unlike “the sons of the Anunaki,” the DINGIR.MAḪḪI.A recur in numerous Hittite texts, their role in the recreation of the storm god could have been interpreted as a local feature. Nevertheless, the Levantine origin of the composition suggests that they may ultimately represent a different group in origin.

The mother goddesses and the fate goddesses serve in Hittite texts of Hurrian origin—myths and rituals alike—as equivalents of Hutena and Ḫutellura, the two Hurrian groups of birth goddesses.[[31]](#footnote-32) The West Semitic counterparts of the latter were the seven Koṯarātu, known from Ebla, Mari, Emar, and Ugarit.[[32]](#footnote-33) The Ugaritic god lists posit the Koṯarātu as equivalents of the Šassūrātu, Nintu, and Ninmaḫ,[[33]](#footnote-34) all of which serve in Mesopotamian god lists and narratives as mother goddesses. In the Weidner god list from Emar, it is the group of Ḫutellura, the Hurrian equivalent of DINGIR.MAḪḪI.A, that equates with the Mesopotamian mother goddesses Aruru, Nintu, Ninmaḫ, and Ninḫursag.[[34]](#footnote-35) In light of these god lists, Emmanuel Laroche reconstructed the names of Ḫutellura alongside the Koṯarātu in the Ugaritic polyglot list in Ugaritica 5, no. 137: “[d*Ḫu-ti-i*]*l-lu-u*[*r-ra*] = [*Ku-ša*]*-ra-tum*.”[[35]](#footnote-36) While, unlike the Mesopotamian Nintu, Ninmaḫ, and Aruru, the Koṯarātu do not participate in the creation of humankind according to the Ugaritic belletristic texts, they are involved in the creation of a newborn, both divine and mortals (cf. *KTU* 1.10, 1.11, and 1.17), in keeping with the DINGIR.MAḪḪI.A and Ḫutellura.[[36]](#footnote-37) Thus, it is plausible that just as *IŠTAR* most likely represents Anat or Astarte, and d10 represents the Levantine storm god in the *Myth of Elkinirša Ašertu, and the Storm God*, the DINGIR.MAḪḪI.A represent the Koṯarātu, who help to revive the storm god.

1. “A man of the city of Amurru”

The human healer who saved the storm god through exorcism is described in the text cited above as “a man of the city of Amurru” (l. 8′), whereas the provenance of the second healer is only partially legible. Itamar Singer suggested that the two healers could have been Amorite and Ḫanean exorcists. Alternatively, he identified the toponym URU*Ana*[…] with the city of Anat, formerly Ḫanat, which is situated on the Euphrates, east of Terqa.[[37]](#footnote-38) However, the designation of the Amorites disappeared in the second half of the second millennium BCE.[[38]](#footnote-39) By the fourteenth century BCE, the toponym “city of Amurru” commonly referred to a certain city in the kingdom of Amurru, located south of Ugarit, probably Ṣumur (Irqata and Tunip are also possible).[[39]](#footnote-40) Consequently, it is likely that the toponym beginning with URU*Ana*- could be located nearby. We are familiar with the Late Bronze Age toponyms Ananu (LÚ URU*A-na-ni-yi*) and Anabu (LÚ URU*A-na-bi*) in texts from Ugarit and Emar, respectively,[[40]](#footnote-41) and later also with southern toponyms like ענתות, ענניה, (בית-) ענת and (קרית-) ענבים in biblical texts.

Because the ritualistic elements penetrate the narrative, the mention of the exorcists’ provenance may testify to the origin of the myth itself. In other words, it is plausible that like many oral traditions, the myth under consideration was delivered through ritualistic practices performed by exorcists, one of whom in this case was a man of the kingdom of Amurru. Nevertheless, in light of the Canaanite shift reflected in the text, and its absence in Amurrite textual findings,[[41]](#footnote-42) the origin of the present version seems to be located even further south, while the man of Amurru served as one of its transmitters.

1. The anti-witchcraft ritual

The purification ritual commences in the fourth column of the text. The only section preserved from this ritual is the one related to the harmed body parts of the patron (*KUB* 36.35 IV):

(12) […] *mān* LÚ-x[...] … (14) [*nu=šši=kan* SAG.DU]-˹*za*˺ *tē*˹*da*˺*nan* [*dāš* (15) *IŠTU* IGIḪI.A-*Š*]*U*=˹*ši*˺=*kan uwātar dā*[*š* (16) *IŠTU* GEŠTUḪI.A-*ŠU*=*ši=kan*] *ištamaššuwar dā*[*š* (17)... -*a*]*m*˹ *m*˺*alli*? *dāš* *IŠT*[*U*... (18) …] ˹:*m*˺*ištin*[[42]](#footnote-43) *d*[*āš* (19) … *IŠT*]*U*? NÍ.˹TE˺-ŠU=*š*[*i=kan*...]

(12) If [an evil?][[43]](#footnote-44) man […]… (14) From [his/her head he took] a hair. (15) [From h]is/[h]er [eyes he] took seeing. (16) [From his/her ears he] took hearing. (17) [From his/her… he] took […]. Fro[m his/her…(18) … he] to[ok] a glance? [(19) … Fro]m his/her body h[e took…]

As noted by previous scholars, there is a close similarity between the preserved text above and a purification ritual against witchcraft for King Šuppiluliyuma II (*CTH* 780.III). The latter includes the following:

Cleanse(pl.) them (*šanḫten=at*) of Šuppiluliyuma’s b[ody (parts)]: if someone from his head took a hair, if someone from his mouth took saliva, if someone from his eyes took seeing …”.[[44]](#footnote-46)

The close similarity between these texts suggests that the section in our ritual began roughly thus: “[Cleanse them, of the patron’s body parts:] if [an evil] man […]… from [his/her head he took] a hair,” etc. In other words, it is suggested that the missing beginning of the ritual includes an order to purify the damaged limbs listed in the preserved list.

Remarkably, the anti-witchcraft ritual for King Šuppiluliyuma II was attributed to the old lady Allaituraḫḫi of Mukiš. Since Šuppiluliyuma II lived long after Allaituraḫḫi, at the end of the thirteenth century BCE, while the earlier ritual attributed to that old lady is dated to the fifteenth century, Hannah Marcuson and Theo van den Hout proposed that the ritual was either composed in her tradition or Šuppiluliyuma’s name was inserted into an older text attributed to Allaituraḫḫi of Mukiš.[[45]](#footnote-47) Either way, the similarity between that ritual and the ritual ending the myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm God implies that they both belong to the same tradition derived from Allaituraḫḫi of Mukiš. As such, the Syrian origin of the old lady aligns well with that of the healers who aided the storm god in our text. However, since two other rituals attributed to the old lady of Mukiš have a significant Hurrian stratum,[[46]](#footnote-48) our text likely belongs to the group of West Semitic sources that made their way to Hatti by virtue of the Hurrians, despite the absence of distinct Hurrian elements in the text.[[47]](#footnote-49)

1. The dying and rising storm god

Despite the fragmentary state of the last two columns of the work, the preserved terminology within them clarifies that following the hostility between Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the storm god, the latter was compelled to descend to the netherworld and was subsequently revived by the mother goddesses. Gary Beckman summarizes this event as follows:

Also mentioned are the “Dark Earth,” the Hittite term for the netherworld, and the Anunnaki-Deities, known from Mesopotamian texts as the rulers of this dismal portion of the universe. Thus it seems that Baal must have died and been brought back from the dead, an impression strengthened by the presence of the Mother-goddesses in this portion of the composition.[[48]](#footnote-51)

Notably, of all the events depicted in the present composition, the purification ritual that follows the historiola seems to be thematically linked to the bodily injuries that the storm god sustained in the netherworld, and to his subsequent ascent upon being healed. In other words, this last part must have been the central element of the historiola, as it was closely associated with the healing process of the human patient. In contrast to the hesitation of some scholars to define the storm god as a dying and rising god,[[49]](#footnote-53) it thus becomes apparent that the mythologem of the dying and rising storm god circulated not only in Ugarit during that era, as testified by the second part of the *Baal Cycle* and implied in some further Ugaritic texts (*KTU* 1.12; *KTU* 1.17 VI 26–32), but also in Hatti, and seemingly in Amurru and southward as well. Consequently, it extends the *terminus post quem* of that mythologem beyond the timeframe covered by the Ugaritic texts.[[50]](#footnote-54) Furthermore, the myth’s ritualistic function reveals one of the ways in which the mythologem of the dying and rising storm god was disseminated among the ancient Near Eastern cultures of the second half of the second millennium BCE, namely, through the mediation of sorcerers.[[51]](#footnote-55)

C. Summary

This paper aimed to shed light on five elements within the second part of the Hittite composition *The Myth of Elkunirša, Ašertu, and the Storm God* that either have a Northwest Semitic background or are connected to the Levantine cultures. Some of these elements appear to be better interpreted through our familiarity with Northwest Semitic languages, while others, alternatively, broaden our understanding of the Levantine literature, its timeframe, and its transmission route. Thus, while the unique phrase “the sons of the Anunaki” was interpreted in light of a common Semitic structure, the dissemination of the Levantine mythologem of the dying and rising storm god, including the role of the Koṯarātu within it, was confirmed thanks to this Hittite composition. Additionally, the informants of this myth, the Amurrite and the Syro-Hurrian sorcerers, through whom the myth was likely transmitted until it reached Hatti, were identified due to the preservation of the ritual at the end of the myth and the penetration of ritualistic elements into the myth itself. These issues, along with those already known to us from the first part of the myth, such as the usage of the Levantine phrase “seventy gods” and the traces of the Canaanite shift that located the origin of the myth south of Amurru, expand our understanding not only of the Hittite composition itself but also of its origins.

1. Cf., e.g., Singer 1995, 128; Miller 2004; 2005; Strauß 2006; Campbell 2016; Corti 2017; Gilan 2019; Ayali-Darshan 2020, 41–69; Görke 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Cf. Laroche 1968, 139; Dijkstra 2016, 128. Previously, the fragments containing a prayer to Kunirša, accompanied by an astral ritual on the obverse, and some additional parallel fragments (CTH 342.2), were regarded as integral components of the present composition (Haas 1994, 173 and n. 137; 2006, 216; Bachvarova 2013, 32). However, Dijkstra (2013; 2016) inferred that the prayer and the associated ritual constitute a separate composition(s). For the astral ritual on the obverse of the tablet and its Hittite (including CTH 342.1.3) and Ugaritic parallels, see Ayali-Darshan, forthcoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Otten 1953a; 1953b, 30–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Laroche 1968; Hoffner 1998, 90–92; Beckman 2003; Haas 2006, 213–216. The cited Hittite text below mostly follows Rieken et al. 2009a; 2009b. The translation follows Hoffner 1998; Haas 2006; Rieken et al. 2009a; 2009b. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Cf. Otten 1953a; 1953b, 30–35; Hoffner 1965; Beckman 2003; Haas 2006, 213–216, among others. For additional scholars, see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. For *ˀl-qn-ˀrṣ* in West Semitic texts, see, e.g., *KAI* 26A (from Karatepe); *KAI* 129 (from Leptis Magna). For further occurrences see Kottsieper 2013; McAffee 2013; Lawson-Younger 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. For the participle pronunciation, already attested in the onomasticon of MB Hazor and the El-Amarna letters, see McAffee 2013; Weippert 2014, *contra* Müller 1999. For the phonological problem of the Hittite transcription of the SA sign for the Canaanite phoneme ḍ, see the discussions by the scholars cited above. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. For the identification of *IŠTAR* with Anzili, see Wilhelm 2010; Bachvarova 2013, 31; but cf., Taracha 2009, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See, e.g., Haran 1972; Ayali-Darshan 2015a, 14–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ayali-Darshan 2015b. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Arnaud 1986, 351; Fleming 2000, 238–239. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Arnuad 1986, 380, 447–448, and cf. Fleming 2000, 194, n. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. This transformation aligns with the biblical tradition of reimagining gods, each revered by a particular nation (cf. Judg 11:23–24; Dan 10:13; Jub 15:31–35), as angels. For additional insights into the concept of the seventy gods in Northwest Semitic texts, see Ayali-Darshan 2015a. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. As Hoffner 1965 convincingly noted, a number of parallelisms in this prosaic text also attest to its Semitic poetic origin, since unlike Ugaritic and Mesopotamian literature, the entire corpus of extant Hittite belletristic texts is written in prose. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. The text is reconstructed by duplicate *KUB* 36.37+ *KUB* 31.118 II, 4′–6′, 12′–13′. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. While the lexeme *ḫapupi-* carries the meaning of a bird, its species is uncertain, as it is a *hapax*. Haas (2006, 215 and n. 2) translates it as “swallow,” while Hoffner 1965 offers “owl” according to his interpretation of the whole passage, see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Hoffner 1965, and cf. Hoffner 1998, 90; Beckman 2003; Haas 2006, 215, n. 2; *HED* H, 131. For kôs (a contraction of *kēwas*), see Lev 11:17; Deut 14:16; Ps 10:27. While *ks* (=cup) is found in other Semitic languages, a homonymous identity exists only where the Canaanite shift ā > ō takes place. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. See *KUB* 36.35 vs I 5’ (cf. Singer 2007, 632, 636). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. An additional motif of possibly Northwest Semitic origin is embedded in the present text: “the seductive woman and the refusing youth,” which was disseminated into further Mediterranean literature, as reflected in texts from Egypt (pD’Orbiney), Israel (Gen 37–50), and Greece (Iliad 6, regarding Bellerophon; Euripides, regarding Hippolytus). However, the wide distribution of this motif has led to controversy over its origin, and irrelevant texts were often considered to contain this motif. See, e.g., Astour 1965, 186 n. 4; 256–261; Redford 1970, 91–93; Hollis 1989; West 1997, 365–367. Notably, the motifs of Ašertu’s seven years of mourning, the hostility between the storm god and Ašertu, and the representation of Elkunirša as a weak figure that succumbs to every demand, all appear in the Ugaritic literature as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Hoffner 1965, 10–11, n. 34 (followed by, e.g., *HED* H, 398–399, s.v. *ḫuripta*-) proposed that the hapax lexeme *ḫuript-* was borrowed from Akkadian *ḫuribtu*, denoting a desert or a steppe. Singer 2007, 633, n. 13 further suggested that the reference was to the vast plains of northern Mesopotamia and Syria. However, considering the Levantine origin of the text, its borrowing from a Northwest Semitic language cannot be ruled out either; cf. Hebrew חרבה, חרבות; Aramaic חרבתא (see *HALOT* s.v. חרבה). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Singer 2007 alternatively suggests: “oily,” following *CHD* S, 49a, s.v. *šaknuwant*- B (the translation “impure” stems from *šaknuwant*- A). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. For the Akkadian meaning of the Sumerian Anunaki in Hittite texts, see Reiner/Güterbock 1967, 265–266, and cf. Lorenz-Link 2009, 207–209. For its usage as an appellation of the Hurro-Hittite “primeval gods” residing in the netherworld, see also Archi 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. cf. *HALOT*, s.v. בן, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. While such a linguistic structure exists in Akkadian, as shown above, it was not employed in this specific combination; therefore, its origin does not seem to be Akkadian. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. *CHD* L–N 297a. Hoffner 1998 alternatively translates this as: “radiant,” and similarly Haas 2006: “glaenzend.” See a short discussion in *CHD* ibid. Rieken et al. 2009b do not reconstruct the verb in a plural form. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Hoffner 1998 alternatively suggests: “re[created…]”. Haas 2006 and Rieken et al. 2009b: “wie[der]”. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Hoffner 1998; Haas 2006. Rieken et al. 2009b analyze the component *za* alternatively, as a reflexive, rather than an ablative. Note that Dijkstra 2016, 130, 132 suggests that in these lines *IŠTAR* is offering to provide a substitute for the storm god in order to bring him back from the netherworld. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. See the discussion of Beckman 1983, 238–248, with previous references. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. See Fuscagni 2016. The translation follows Archi 2013, 11; *CHD* Š 125a, s.v. *šamnāi-*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Beckman 1983, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Laroche 1948, 124–126; Archi 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Archi 2013, and cf. Pasquali 2006; Archi 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Roche-Hawley 2012, 171, 175. In earlier god lists from Mari the Koṯarātu follow the Šassūrātu: (1) ll. 11–12: d*Ša-zu*-[*ru-um*] d*Ku-ša-*[*ra-tum*]; (2) ll. 7-8: d*Sin-zu-ru-um* d*Kà-wa*6*-šu-ra-tum*; see Lambert 1985, 529–530; Archi 2013, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Salvini 2015, 54, and cf. Laroche 1980, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Laroche 1980, 111, followed by Roche-Hawley 2012, 160; Salvini 2015, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Another group of seven deities involved in birth, which scholars have compared to the Koṯarātu, are the Egyptian Ḫathors; see Lipiński 1965, 65–66 (and cf. Rahmouni 2012, 59–61, for a general review). It is worth noting that the seven Hathors are specifically described in this role in two compositions with a Levantine background: *The Doomed Prince* and *The Two Brothers*. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Singer 2007, 634. Idem 1991a claims that the term “Amorites” as a designation of people from the Syrian region occurs in Hittite texts (as KUR.KURḪI.A URUAmurra). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. The last documents attesting to the designation of the Amorites appear to come from Alalaḫ VII of the sixteenth century BCE; see *RGTC* 12/2, s.v. Amurru (p. 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. For “the city of Amurru” as the capital of the kingdom of Amurru, see Singer 1991b, 158; Stieglitz 1991; Benz 2016, 176–178, and cf. *RGTC* 12/2, s.v. Amurru (p, 22–24). For the kingdom of Amurru in general, see Singer 1991b; Klengel 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Cf. *RGTC* 6/1, s.v. Ana[ (p. 15); Singer 2007, 634, n. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. As for the pronunciation of the name Ašertu, the El-Amarna letters from Amurru provide the variations *a-ši-ir-ti*7 (e.g. EA 61), which aligns with the Hittite text pronunciation, and *aš-ra-tu*4 (e.g. EA 60), as the Babylonian pronunciation (for references, see Rainey 2015). Note that the Amorite-Akkadian bilingual list includes *a-še-ra-tum* (George/Krebernik 2022, 115, 118), resembling the biblical Hebrew pronunciation. For a discussion of the pronunciation of the goddess’ name in Ugarit according to the syllabic script, see Roche-Hawley 2012, 162 and further literature therein. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. For a discussion on this Luwian word, see *HED* M 15–16, s.v., *maist-.* [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Thus Haas 2006, 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. *ChS* I/5, no. 25 = *KUB* 41.21, I 7′ and duplicates; cf. *CHD* S 170, s.v. *šanḫ-* 8k. For the links between these texts, see Haas 2003, 557–558; 2006, 216; 2007a, 350–351; Bachvarova 2013. Cf. Haas and others who detect a Mesopotamian influence on this type of ritual: Haas 2007b, 32–34; Strauß 2006, 210–211; Mouton 2010, 114, but see Schwemer 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
45. Marcuson/van den Hout 2015, 166, n. 52. See also the discussion of Marcuson 2016, esp. 33–39, and further literature therein. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
46. Miller 2004, 506–511; 2005; cf. Haas 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
47. Cf. also Singer 2007. This suggestion can be supported by another Hittite ritual of Hurrian origin (CTH 342.2: *KBo* 53.4 + *KUB* 36.38 + *KUB* 59.65 + Bo 3300) containing a prayer to the god Kunirša, namely, *ˀl-qn-ˀrṣ*, to be recited by the old lady (SALŠU.GI). On the obverse side of the tablet, an astral ritual mentioning a star of the Hurrian god Kumarbi is inscribed. For the prayer, see Dijkstra 2013; 2016; Lawson-Younger 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
48. Beckman 2003; cf. Haas 2006, 216; Singer 2007, 633–634. Convinced of the Northwest Semitic origin of the composition, Beckman translates d10 as Baal. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
49. J.Z. Smith 1987; M.S. Smith 1998, and cf. de Moor 1971, 188–189; Burkert 1979, 188, n. 14; Barstad 1984, 150–151. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
50. For the possibility that the evidence from Mari, regarding the resurrection of DUMU.ZI, extends the *terminus post quem* of this mythologem to the beginning of the second millennium, see Ayali-Darshan, forthcoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
51. Given this, one may ponder whether one of the differences between the Sumerian *Inana’s Descent to the Netherworld* and the later Akkadian *Ištar’s Descent to the Netherworld*, namely the diseases inflicted on Ištar in the netherworld, has any relation to the development of this composition in terms of its function. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)