1  Introduction

Status quaestionis

Scholars of the ancient world have long since recognized that the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh has striking parallels with Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey. But, how could Greek poets have learned of the legendary deeds of the third-millennium Mesopotamian king? And, why were the Greeks interested in a story like his or in any of the other Near Eastern stories that have been shown to have influenced the poetry of Homer and Hesiod? In this book I present an entirely new approach to the first question by focusing on the second one, and I look for answers in Anatolia and Cyprus, where Greeks were in intense contact with Near Eastern cultures for hundreds of years before Homer’s time, rather than in Mesopotamia, with which they had no direct contact. I rely primarily on the information provided by the tablets found in the libraries of the second-millennium Hittites, whose capital Hattusa was located in central Anatolia. Here the stories of Gilgamesh’s deeds have been found in three different languages, along with narratives of how the gods established the current world order, and stories of the Akkadian conqueror Sargon the Great’s voyages into the unknown and of his grandson Naram-Sin’s failings, all of which I shall argue played a role in shaping the Greek tradition of epic.

All our knowledge of the ancient literature that influenced Greek epic is preserved for us by scribes, but the world of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Greeks was an oral one, and the Hittite libraries are an unusually good source of oral-derived literature, allowing us to reconstruct in part the Near Eastern oral traditions to which the Greeks had access. In fact, bilingual Syro-Anatolian oral poets must have been the key means for the transfer of the art of Near Eastern narrative song to the Greeks, and in showing that I arrive at a new model for cross-cultural interaction in the eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

Near Eastern influences on Greek literary and cult practices have become a popular topic for Classical scholars in the last decades; this interest has been driven in large part by the work of Walter Burkert and Martin L. West. Burkert’s Orientalizing Revolution (1992, a revised version
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of the book originally published in German in 1984) popularized the avenue of inquiry among Classicists of this era, and West’s *The East Face of Helicon* (1997a) crowned decades of his publications on the subject,\(^1\) presenting a vast number of striking verbal and thematic correspondences between Near Eastern, especially Semitic, texts and Greek texts. In addition, Sarah Morris (1992a) has discussed the relationship between Greek and west Semitic art, material culture, and poetry from an archaeologist’s perspective. However, relatively few scholars interested in the interactions between Greece and the Near East have focused on Anatolian influence on Greek culture, despite evidence of intensive contact between Greek-speakers and Anatolians beginning in the Late Bronze Age and continuing into and beyond the Classical era.\(^2\) When Classicists have paid attention to Bronze Age Anatolia, their interest is motivated by a long-standing fascination with the Trojan War and the ever-intriguing question of whether the events described by Homer in the *Iliad* have any basis in fact.

When in 1924 Emil Forrer realized that men of Ahhiyawa (cf. the Homeric Achaeans) were mentioned in the Hittite tablets, and Paul Kretschmer connected Alexander (Paris) of Ilium to the king Alaksandu of Wilusa with whom the thirteen-century New Hittite king Mwattalii made a treaty, some embraced the news enthusiastically as evidence for the historicity of the Homeric tradition.\(^3\) However, opinion soon turned against using Hittite texts to understand the *Iliad*, in part because of the vehement objections of the Hittite scholar Ferdinand Sommer and in part because of legitimate skepticism towards somewhat naïve attempts to find the “kernel of truth” in the story of the Trojan War.\(^4\) As it became more acceptable to see Semitic culture as an important influence on the Greeks, the Hittites received even less attention from Classicists, victims of a backlash against the glorification of Indo-European culture.\(^5\) Thus, scholars divided themselves into two camps, with those who supported using Hittite texts to understand Greek culture finding themselves in the

\(^1\) Including his editions of Hesiod’s *Theogony* (1966) and *Works and Days* (1978), and his *Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (1971a).

\(^2\) S. P. Morris (2001a; 2001b) has been the exception, turning her attention to Anatolia as a key place of contact. Burkert (2004) is still focused on the Neo-Assyrian period and directly afterwards. Lane Fox (2009) focuses on mercantile connections between Euboea and north Syria in the same period.

\(^3\) Forrer (1924a; 1924b), Kretschmer (1924). For a synopsis of the early discussion see Beckman, Bryce, and Cline (2011: 1–3).


\(^5\) Burkert (1992: 1–8) presents a balanced discussion of the history of the changing attitudes of Classical scholars towards the contribution of the Near East.
minority while the majority looked to texts in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew to elucidate the prehistory of the Greek literary tradition, focusing especially on that part of the Neo-Assyrian period which corresponds to the Greek Orientalizing era, narrowly defined as 750–650 BCE. In this framework the numerous correspondences between Semitic and Greek poetic phrases, myths, and religious practices are typically explained as the result of direct borrowing. The minority who advocate looking to Anatolia as an important site for transfer of Near Eastern culture to Greek-speakers have generally been Hittitologists, Anatolian archaeologists, or Indo-Europeanists, such as G. Huxley, Hans Güterbock, Jaan Puhvel, and Calvert Watkins.

Furthermore, until the late 1990s knowledge of Anatolian political geography was not detailed enough to withstand the attacks of dissenters who argued against the equations of Ahhiyawa with Mycenaean Greeks, and Wilusa with Ilium. Their objections, however, have since been invalidated by new archaeological finds and the decipherment of key Hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions. Armed with the Hittite administrative documents and our current understanding of the Linear B texts and Mycenaean civilization, the Homerist Joachim Latacz has re-opened the question of whether the Homeric tradition preserves a memory of an historical event in the Late Bronze Age that was immortalized in song by Mycenaean bards, to which he answers a resounding “yes.” I myself am much less sanguine about the possibility of genuine memories of Bronze Age events. In this book I focus primarily on epic traditions, that is, traditional storylines in which legends about the past meant to explain the present were cast. That is, I am more interested in ancient historiography (if we can use this term for orally transmitted stories) than ancient historical events.

Indeed, the libraries and archives at the Hittite capital of Hattusa, modern-day Boğazköy, have much more to offer to Classicists interested in the prehistory of Greek culture than new leads on the possible historical
events behind Homer’s Trojan War, interesting as that question may be. Cuneiform documents in seven different languages provide a unique window into a Late Bronze Age Mediterranean culture created from early Proto-Indo-European concepts, indigenous Anatolian practices, Mesopotamian learning, and west Semitic and Hurrian traits. We can compare different forms of the same stories and ritual activities passing through different avenues, via oral or written transmission, and through the mediation of different peoples, speaking Luwian, Hurrian, west Semitic, or Akkadian. The models we derive from the Hittite data can then be applied to Greek materials, to elucidate exactly how Near Eastern and indigenous motifs and narrative patterns could have been adopted and adapted by Greek-speakers. Thus, the Hittite material is an unparalleled resource for any scholar interested in cultural contact in the ancient world.

Furthermore, the numerous correspondences between Hittite and Greek ritual and literary themes and motifs indicate that Anatolia must have been an important channel by which the literary and religious traditions of the wider Near East reached the Greeks, whether in the Mycenaean period, the Early Iron Age, or later. In some cases the texts from the Hittite archives present interpretations of themes or put together motifs in ways that stand midway between the Greek and Mesopotamian traditions.

Finally, Hurro-Hittite narrative poetry, attested almost exclusively in the Hittite archives and one of the main focuses of this book, presents a precious witness for the prehistory of the Homeric tradition.

I am interested not only in the content of the texts, but also in how the correspondences between the two sets of texts came into being – how Greeks came into contact with Near Eastern epic, why Greeks were interested in it, and the means by which the narratives were converted into Greek narratives. Therefore, in this book, I present both the texts that were found in the Hittite libraries and their context: their function, the gods to whom they were attached, the values they espoused, the milieus in which they were performed, and how they moved around and were adapted to new audiences. I have focused on several key factors: the value placed on exotic objects and knowledge from far away and long ago, the desire of local courts and polities to connect themselves to world history, the transfer and syncretism of gods, the opportunity for contact among proficient performers afforded by festivals and other public displays, and the role of healing rituals and royal ancestor veneration. All of these can be subsumed under one rubric: legitimization of authority. Throughout I apply my findings on the second-millennium material to analyze the
prehistory of Homer’s epics, showing how each factor worked synergistically
with the others to promote the transfer of epic narratives from east to
west, first to the Hittites and then eventually to the Greeks.

The evidence I analyze in this book for the most part is not meant to
invalidate earlier discussions of east–west interaction, only to add more
pieces to the puzzle, although I would emphasize the following: my focus is
on oral transmission of Near Eastern motifs rather than transmission via
writing; I do not believe that the Orientalizing period as defined by Burkert
was the most important period of Near Eastern influence on Homer’s
poetry; and I am skeptical of direct contact between Assyrians and Greeks
as a crucial vector of transmission of Mesopotamian literature, as opposed
to a more indirect route that passed plots and motifs from Akkadian
through the Hurrian, west Semitic, non-Greek language(s) of Cyprus,
and/or Anatolian languages before they reached Greek-speakers.

Finally, a methodological note: although the ultimate end point of my
investigation is the time of Homer and Hesiod, I am often forced to use
evidence from later periods because of the large gap in the data between ca.
1175 and 700 BCE. Many of my conclusions rely on the assumption that if
conditions or features were present both in the Late Bronze Age and in the
Early Iron Age, then they can be surmised to be survivals from the Bronze
Age and operating during the gap between the end of the Bronze Age and
the beginning of documentation again in the Iron Age, even though the
gap extended across several centuries.

The world of the Hittites

I begin with some background information about the Hittites. Speakers of
the Anatolian branch of the Indo-European language family, they entered
Anatolia some time in the third millennium BCE, probably from the west.\(^\text{11}\)
In the second millennium we see two major Anatolian languages: Luwian
and Hittite. Luwian-speakers appear to be concentrated in the west and
south, and Hittite-speakers were concentrated around the Old Assyrian
merchant colony of Kanesh (Hittite Nesa, modern Kültepe), the city after
which the Hittites named their own language nešili, and they extended east

\(^{11}\) Steiner (1990), pace Stefanini (2002). For more details on Hittite civilization, consult especially
Bryce (2002; 2005), Collins (2007b), Klenge et al. (1999), and the relevant articles in Sasson
grammar of Hittite, see Hoffner and Melchert (2008).
to the upper Euphrates. The Hittites first enter world history in the form of names found in the Akkadian records from Level II of Kanesh, which was destroyed ca. 1835 BCE. They re-appear in the archives of their capital Hattusa, modern-day Boğazköy, located in central Anatolia in the bend of the Kızıl Irmak River. Originally the site of an Assyrian merchant colony, Hattusa had been razed by Anitta of Kussara, the first Hittite king to leave a record of his achievements; but, some seventy years after Anitta’s reign, ca. 1650 BCE, Hattusili I seized power and set up the city anew. The Hittites became players in the international zero-sum competition for wealth, prestige, and power when king Hattusili I began to assert Hittite hegemony in north Syria as far as Aleppo, and then across the Euphrates, eventually all the way to Babylon, which was sacked by his grandson and adopted son Mursili I in 1595 BCE (according to the “high middle chronology”). The Old Kingdom lasted about 150 years, after which Hittite power and resources were reduced by intradynastic strife and the pressure of population groups to the north and east, especially the Kaska (whose linguistic affiliations are unknown), and the Hurrians.

Hittite hegemony expanded anew ca. 1400 BCE under the first New Kingdom ruler, king Tudhaliya I/II, moving east and south as the Hittites spread their control to Kizzuwatna (Plain Cilicia). Tudhaliya also turned to the west, where he took on the Assuwa confederation and scuffled with the “men of Ahhiyawa.” The Middle Hittite period, which refers to a stage of the Hittite language, starts a generation later with Arnuwanda I. The Hurrian Mitanni confederation or empire in northeast Syria was terminated by king Suppiluliuma I (1350–1322 BCE), whose reign marks the beginning of the linguistic period called New Hittite. However, western Anatolia proved to be perennially troublesome, despite the break-up of the large Arzawan state by Suppiluliuma’s son Mursili II into three or four smaller states interlinked with each other and with the Hittite royal family through dynastic marriages.

By 1300 BCE the north Syrian lands of Carchemish, Aleppo, Emir, Amurru, and Ugarit were under Hittite control and interlinked through royal marriages, some more closely than others. Cyprus had been pulled into

13 For a clear overview of the history of Kanesh, see Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen (2012: 43–52).
14 For the high middle chronology, see the notes to the Bronze Age chronological chart included in this volume (Table 1).
15 It remains uncertain whether the well-known king Tudhaliya was the first or second of his name to reign in the second half of the fifteenth century. See Bryce (2005: 122–3).
16 Melchert (2007).
the Hittite orbit, and the Hittite empire considered itself to be on par with Assyria and Egypt, Muwattalli II, son of Mursili II, defeating Ramses II at the battle of Kadesh in 1274 BCE. Muwattali experimented with transplanting the Hittite capital to Tarhuntassa, strategically located on the coast in Rough Cilicia, but his brother Hattusili III soon returned it to Hattusa.

Hittite power reached its peak under Hattusili III, although it began to decline almost immediately under his son and successor Tudhaliya IV, who undertook a major building spree continued by his son Suppiluliuma II, renovating the capital extensively. The Hittite empire fell ca. 1180 BCE, perhaps in part because of the internal strife which had consistently plagued the royal family throughout its history, and in part for whatever causes left other famous east Mediterranean empires and cities vulnerable to the so-called Sea Peoples. But, the capital was vacated peacefully and deliberately by Hittite officials, some people continued to live there, and it was eventually settled by the Phrygians. Hittite traditions survived at least to some degree in the Neo-Hittite states of southeast Anatolia and northwest Syria, such as Adana, Tabal, Hilakku, Que, Kummuh and Karatepe, Carchemish, Malatya, and Sam’al; these are the Hittites of the Hebrew Bible. Ca. 700 BCE the Neo-Hittite states (Hatti) were finally subsumed into the Assyrian empire.

The primary site in which Hittite texts are found is Hattusa, which contained several archives and libraries, the most notable of which are the storerooms near Temple 1, the Haus am Hang, and archives A, E, and K in the citadel Büyük Kale (Map 3). Three other spots in east-central Anatolia have provided a number of Hittite texts: Ortaköy (Hittite Sapinuwa), Maşat (Tapikka), and Kuşaklı (Sarissa). A small number of tablets in Hittite, letters or ritual and literary texts, have also been found in north Syria (Emar and Ugarit) and Egypt (Amarna).

The majority of the texts found in the various archives of Hattusa are New Hittite (1320–1190 BCE), with some Middle Hittite (1400–1320 BCE),

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19 On continuity in north Syria leading into the Iron Age, see Bryce (2012) and the discussions of the historical contexts of each set of inscriptions edited in Hawkins (2000); also Chapter 12 of this book. On the Neo-Hittites as the Hittites of the Hebrew Bible, see Bryce (2012: 64–75) and Collins (2007a; 2007b).
20 See Seeher (2002) for a description of the various sites in which tablets were found. Van den Hout (2002a; 2006; 2009b) discusses the text collections and what they can tell us about Hittite administration and the organization of the archives.
21 A few texts dating to the Middle Hittite period have also been found at Kayalpinar (Samuha) (Rieken 2009), and two Late New Hittite texts have been found at Oymağaaç, which has been supposed to be ancient Nerik (Czichon 2008; Czichon et al. 2011: 213, 219).
and fewer Old Hittite (1650–1400 BCE) texts, while the texts from Sapinuwa and Tapikka are Middle Hittite, and those from Sarissa are Late New Hittite. It must be emphasized that the terms Old, Middle, and New Hittite refer to linguistic features in the texts and are not tied to cultural or political developments.\textsuperscript{22} Paleographically Hittite texts have been divided into Old, Middle, and New Script, based on sign forms and overall ductus: how close together the signs are written, how much the signs are slanted, and how close to the edges of the column the lines begin and end.\textsuperscript{23} Since many texts are copies of older ones, texts can show Old Hittite grammatical forms with New Script paleography; very few texts show Old Script ductus. It has been recently suggested that the distinction between Old Script and Middle Script is not as sharp as once thought; if Old Script is merged with Middle Script and only securely datable texts are taken into consideration, Hittite texts in the Hittite style of cuneiform writing are first clearly attested no earlier than 1500 BCE.\textsuperscript{24}

The specific details of how the Hittites learned how to write on clay tablets in the Mesopotamian cuneiform script are still unclear. We do know of Akkadian scribes in Hattusa who taught their sons how to write,\textsuperscript{25} but how men like them got there is a subject of speculation. It has been suggested that scribes who were brought back from the campaigns of Hattusili I in northern Syria introduced cuneiform to Hattusa.\textsuperscript{26} Certainly the Old Assyrian script standard for the texts found at Kanesh is not the precursor of the Hittite Old Script. Hittite cuneiform resembles most closely the north Syrian variant of Old Babylonian script, suggesting that the script was already being used in Anatolia before Hattusili I.\textsuperscript{27} Finally, we now know that there were already scribes in the court of Hattusili I who knew how to write in Akkadian before he had completed his campaigns in north Syria, as shown by the Tikunani Letter addressed to Tunip-Teshshub and written in vivid Akkadian, which was probably sent by Hattusili I.

\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, Middle Hittite should be considered a transition stage between Old and New Hittite rather than an independent stage unto itself (Melchert 2007).
\textsuperscript{24} Van den Hout (2009a: 2009b, with earlier references) and Wilhelm (2010a). The final word on this debate has not been spoken. See Archi (2010) for a dissenting view.
\textsuperscript{25} Beckman (1983b).
\textsuperscript{26} Rüster and Neu (1989: 15, with earlier references).
\textsuperscript{27} Klinger (1998), who also notes that classic Akkadian texts and learning only appear in abundance in the Middle Hittite period. The Hittite script is most similar to the script of Alalakh vii (17th cent. BCE, van den Hout 2009b: 87, with earlier references). The redactional history of texts earlier than Hattusili I, such as \textit{CTH} 1: \textit{Proclamation of Anitta} (trans. H. A. Hoffner, Jr. in Hallo and Younger 1997: 182–4), is still unexplained. On the prehistory of the text and Kültepe Ib (1835 to late 18th cent. BCE) as the seat of Anitta, see Bryce (2005: 35–7).
I shortly before he destroyed Hassu in his campaigns into north Syria.28 Certainly, Akkadian texts at Hattusa were written in more than one ductus, which do not necessarily correspond with the contemporaneous Hittite ductus, indicating that they were written by scribes who came from different scholastic traditions, and were not necessarily trained at Hattusa.29

Hattusa (in Akkadian Ḥatti) was a multilingual, multicultural site. Hittite, the language most frequently used in the texts, was an Indo-European language, but the Anatolian branch to which it belongs diverges markedly from other Indo-European languages, showing that it separated off quite early from the rest of the family. Hittite was used to record ritual and religious texts such as purification rituals, descriptions of festivals, prayers, vows, omens, and oracular responses, as well as instruction texts, letters, treaties, annals, law collections, and other administrative texts, and finally myths and other narratives – what we would call literature.30 The other Indo-European Anatolian languages attested at Hattusa are Luwian and Palaic, the latter relatively closely related to Hittite, associated with northeast Anatolia (Paphlagonia), and recorded only in a few ritual texts.31 Some non-Anatolian language texts are found at Hattusa. There are some Sumerian texts, mostly scholastic in nature, while Akkadian was used for international correspondence and treaties, as well as prayers, medical texts, omen compendia, and other types of learned texts, including classic stories of Gilgamesh, the gods, and Akkadian heroes such as Sargon the Great and his grandson Naram-Sin. The substrate language Hattic (hāttili in Hittite, tentatively linked to northwest Caucasian languages) appears in a few ritual and omen texts,32 and Hurrian, a language related to Urartian and possibly linked to northeast Caucasian languages,33 was also used in rituals, omen texts, and in a genre of narrative song that shares striking parallels with Greek hexametric poetry and is a major focus of this book.

Hurrian is otherwise found in the Mitanni Letter sent by king Tushratta to Pharaoh Amenhotep III at Amarna in Egypt (ca. 1388–1351/0 B.C.E.), and

29 Klinger (2003).
30 The fullest collection of translations of Hittite texts is in the German series Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, general editors R. Borger et al. (TUAT); Haas (2006) is a collection of the Hittite texts that have literary qualities. One useful source in English is The Context of Scripture, edited by W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger (1997, 2000, 2002).
33 On Hurrian see Wegner (2007).
at a few other sites, such as Nuzi, Mari, Urkesh (Tell Mozan), and Ugarit, but it is best attested at Hattusa. Hurrian names first appear in the record around 2300 BCE and references to Hurrians and documents in Hurrian become more frequent over the course of the first half of the second millennium. Their primary area of settlement was northern Iraq (Subartu), western Iran, and southeast Turkey into north Syria. Urkesh at the upper reaches of the Habur River was an important Hurrian city in the Ur III period (end of third millennium BCE), and at that point the Hurrians controlled Nineveh. In the seventeenth century they are well attested at Alalakh vii in north Syria, and by the sixteenth century various polities appear to be working as a larger confederation – if not empire – called Mitanni, the upper echelons of which were intermixed with Indo-Iranians. The site of its most important city Washukanni has not yet been confirmed, but it may be Tell el Fakhariya. As Hattusili I expanded his empire east, he came into conflict with the Hurrians, but in the end they proved to be important intermediaries of Mesopotamian traditions and north Syrian practices for the Hittites, although influence from both cultures had already reached Anatolia by the Old Assyrian period (ca. 1970 BCE) through the network of Assyrian merchant colonies, especially Kanesh. We have evidence that some Hittite royalty and high officials in the Middle Hittite period spoke Hurrian; for example, the priest Kantuzzili is the author of an invocation of Teshshub and Hebat in Hurrian. This is the period in which strong Hurrian influence on Hittite religious and magical practices becomes evident, a development that is to be connected in large part with the annexation into the Hittite empire of the Cilician state of Kizzuwatna, whose cult center was Kummani, mother city of the Classical Comana, where Luwians and Hurrians had blended to form a characteristic southeastern Anatolian culture as the Mitanni hegemony faded away. And, by 1375 BCE at the latest, Hittite kings could bear two names, one Hittite and one Hurrian, an acknowledgment of the mix of ethnicities in the royal line.


37 E.g., Tashmi-Sharri = Tudhaliya III, see Bryce (2005: 430 n. 91).