Narrative Constructions of the Past in the Hittite Texts

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Abstract

Hittite historiography has been a subject of some debate since the 70s, positing a series of methodological problems for Hittitologists when confronted with textual sources. With the goal of approaching how the Hittites built their past, the present analysis focuses on different texts (such as Treaties, Annals, Testaments, etc.), and on the methodological strategies developed by scholars in studying these sources. As a result, the article revolves around the theoretical discussion of the main issues encompassing Hittite history.

Keywords: Historiography - Hittites – Ancient Near East – Anatolia

> *Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story.*
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> *It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult.*
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> (H. White 1980: 08)

Introduction

The present analysis takes I. Singer's thoughts about modern studies on history as its starting point, and more specifically, those regarding a Hittite past. As we can observe, he incisively pointed that "…most historical studies, including general surveys, touch only sporadically, if at all, on theoretical and methodological issues, concentrating instead on painstaking philological work of text restoration, dating problems and the reconstruction of a plausible historical narrative. Historians, especially Hittitologists, generally prefer to write narratives than to write *about* narratives." (2011, p. 172). Accordingly, I mean to exhibit a series of issues that surface throughout Hittite studies, so that we can focus on how the Hittites narrated their past.

We may say that the basis for the discussion began during the late 50s, when it was broadly considered the Hittites had a different "*historische Sinn,*" superior to that of neighboring societies of their time. This view, however, mutated over the years, leading to an extensive debate we can frame as "Hittite historiography."

Within Hittitological studies, as "in the field of Assyriology, the term historiography is used in two very different senses. On the one hand it refers to the manner in which the ancients remembered their own past, on the other hand on the theoretical problems raised by our modern reconstructions of that same past." (Hallo, 1998, p. 109). An important fact to highlight, in reference to the second use of the word historiography is the breaking point in historical studies experienced during the 70s—hand in hand with what is usually referenced to as the "linguistic turn"—, when a number of scholars questioned the very idea that historical research could achieve "objective knowledge," challenging the distinction between the historical and the literary. Even though this attitude towards research cannot be confined to this century, what it reflects—in contrast to other previous moments in historical thought—is that knowledge about the past is probably impossible to achieve because the active role of the researcher, who makes the connections between historical events, and organizes them conceptually, is infused by his/her own pre-conceptions and ways of communication (Cabrera, 2005, p. 119).

Broadly speaking, before the 70s, the analyses about the process of historical research considered that the relationship between the historian and historical reality was mediated by two variables: one was the historian (with his/her theory and methods of analysis, together with his/her subjectivity), the other being the historical event. In other words, it was broadly understood that the researcher could interfere and distort the results, but at the same time that it was possible to limit such interference, and sometimes, to make it work for the benefit of the research itself. In contrast to these views, H. White introduced a third possibility imposed by the cultural context, which he calls "implicit preconceptions." In accordance, this variable cannot be reduced or limited because it is identified with the linguistic structures a historian uses to narrate events. This means that language is not a neutral medium of transmission, but a factor that conditions the way reality is perceived, conceived, and represented (cf. Cabrera, 2005, pp. 119-120).

Moreover, as White explains, the historian should always fill gaps of information and thus interpret his/her material on inferential or speculative grounds. Thus, as White states, "once it is admitted that all histories are in some sense interpretations, it becomes necessary to determine the extent to which historians' explanations of past events can qualify as objective…" (1973, p. 281). In this way, White concludes that even when the intention is to study history as objectively as possible, the historians' narrative is determined and codified

by the pre-existent linguistic codes and protocols of their time (White, 1992, p. 37ff). Thus, the importance of distinguishing between "fact" and "event" is crucial (White, 1966, p. 129).

In addition, White summarizes, following C. Lévi-Strauss, another plane in the historiographical debate, applicable as well to Hittitological studies; in other words, the tension between "historical interpretation" and "description;" i.e. "explanation" and "to convey information." As he puts it, historians should "...decide whether they want to *explain* the past (in which case they are indentured to mythic modes of representation) or simply *add* to the body of 'facts' requiring such representation." (1973, p. 289). And even more extreme, he would indicate that "the question for the historian today is not *how* history ought to be studied, but *if* it ought to be studied at all" (cf. Domanska, 1998, p. 180). As White also observes, historiography would be the proper ground to consider the nature of narrativity and narration, because historiography is where our desire for *the imaginary is contested with the imperative of the real* (1980, 8; emphasis added).

According to White, then, events would correspond to imaginative constructions, while facts correspond to occurrences taking place within the material bounds of space and time. Thus, while material facts occurred and can be verified by sources, the events can only be reconstructed conceptually, and because of that, with existence only in language and thought.

On the other edge of the epistemological discussion (where more "objective knowledge" is believed to be grasped from studies of the past) we find P. Ricoeur's approach (2004) where history appears—as pointed out by White—more as "memory cultivated, in the interest of producing a 'collective' past on the basis of which a collective identity can be forged" (2007, p. 235). In any case, what these studies, coming from outside historical research *per se*, bring to the surface is the imperative that modern historians should reflect on these topics, and give their contribution from their own specific field of competence.

As can be observed, we are facing two related problems: one is the ability modern researchers have to write history—i.e. to provide an interpretation of the documents at his/her disposal in order to get closer to a certain past—, and on the other—which comes after one agrees the first is possible—is finding an accurate methodology that would allow the researcher to approach the documents (in this case, Hittite texts). These are not simple matters to work out, rather subjects to which scholars have dedicated their entire life's work. Still, they are central to any historical research.

The Historiographical Debate within Hittite studies

Related questions dealing with research methodology were already raised in the 70s within Ancient Near Eastern studies. It was M. Liverani who proposed to apply semiotic methods to decode ancient sources. As it is noted by Liverani, "such decoding procedure is quite easy, and almost routine work, if author and audience, aims and context are already well known: (…). But this is not the case of ancient historiographic literature, specially the cuneiform one." (1993, p. 48). For ancient sources, thus, Liverani proposes to apply this procedure in reverse, for what "we have to imagine or to postulate the author, the historical juncture and the communicative aims which best explains the extant message—the only 'real thing' we have, and very often in a fragmentary state." (1993, p. 48). Moreover, because the "historical reliability of a text always remains questionable" (1993, p. 46), Liverani proposes to shift the focus of research, and to emphasize the *political aims of the author*, leaving aside the "subject-matter," which was the center of traditional studies. This would imply setting aside the idea that a text could have any reliable "historical kernel," since texts are believed to be so infused with ideology that there would roughly exist any space for *physical reality*, which then turns out to be "almost not important after all" (Liverani, 1990, p. 294; Singer 2011, p. 734). As can be noted, Liverani's general approach to Ancient Near Eastern sources brings us back to our initial interrogations.

Later in time, in a book dedicated to compile Liverani's essays about "Myth and Politics in the Near Eastern Historiography," the author summarizes very clearly his criticism on methodological problems carried out within Hittitological studies, which I believe worthy to read it the author's own words. As he indicates:

> …when they [the scholars] find a continuous account of events for a certain period in an 'ancient' source, one that is not necessarily contemporaneous with the events, they readily adopt it. They limit their work to paraphrasing the source, or, if needed, to rationalization. No one would recommend such a procedure on a theoretical level, but nonetheless it continues to be used, especially in fields where awareness of the methodology and aims of history is not great. It is only too easy to object—and it can never be repeated oft enough – that such 'ancient' historical narratives are generally separated by decades or centuries from the events they narrate. Therefore they are not to be considered as primary sources, but as *historical reconstructions in themselves*. And it is only too easy to recall—this too can never be repeated often enough—that *such historical narratives do not have a 'pure' historical aim*, if such an aim could ever exist. Their aim is political, moral, theological, or whatever else it may be, and therefore they view events from a particular perspective. All these objections can be subsumed under a single point: *history is not something that already exists or is already reconstructed*, and that can be accepted without question. On the contrary, it is an active engagement, which the ancient authors took up in relation to their *own needs, not to ours*. In fact, the 'lazy' historian fails twice:

> first by refusing to take an active role, and then by preserving the active role of the ancient source without even recognizing the fact. (2004, p. 28, emphasis added).

I agree with Liverani on the fact that texts, when referring to the past, should be considered already as historical reconstructions (not as "history" *per se*); as texts which probably did not have a pure historical aim, and were written according to the needs and the ideology (to use the author's terminology) of the ancient societies/elites. Most probably, nobody would deny this.

As we have read, his initial criticism concerns the use of a document belonging to a different "historical context" to reconstruct said context, by paraphrasing it. As I see it, the problem is not only paraphrasing the text without displaying a critical analysis of it, but also the difficulties we find in Hittite studies, where the context is a very vague concept. This is so because the texts' dating is much more in flux now than it was initially thought (e.g. van den Hout, 2005), but also because one tends to refer to long periods of time when contextualizing a Hittite document. As a result, if taking an extreme position, one may also put under scrutiny where the boundaries of a document's context should be set. In fact, H. G. Gadamer made an interesting point while trying to delimit a text's meaning. Starting from its original reader and author, he observed that

> the idea of the contemporary addressee can claim only a restricted critical validity. For what is contemporaneity? Listeners of the day before yesterday as well as of the day after tomorrow are always among those to whom one speaks as a contemporary. Where are we to draw the line that excludes a reader from being addressed? (...) The idea of the original reader is full of unexamined idealization. (2004, p. 396).

As is broadly known, Gadamer's approach implies that the meaning of a text goes beyond its author and its supposed contemporary readers; where understanding is considered not only a reproductive activity but a productive one as well (Gadamer, 2004, p. 296). Within historical studies I believe it is also proper to consider understanding as a productive activity, where the contemporary observer not only sees differently, but s/he sees other things as well; where discovering the true meaning of a text is never a complete activity, but an infinite process; where history is never entirely transparent, but rather it always pushes for more understanding and thus reveals unsuspected elements of meaning (McGaughey, 1988, p. 54).

These ideas bring to mind the matter of whether a present understanding of an event has a connection to the past, or becomes pure creation (for Gadamer's perspective, see: 2004, p. 390ff). Liverani found some answers to these questions by avoiding to center his analysis on the "events" but on *how* they were narrated; viewing the document not as a source of

information, but as information in itself, "not as an opening on a reality laying beyond, but as an *element which makes up the reality*" (Liverani, 1973, p. 179; emphasis added). In a later work we find, though, that Liverani proposes a methodology based on communication theory, "to distinguish what belongs to the level of ideology and what belongs to *the level of reality*, what is stereotyped convention and *what is specific information*" (2001, p. 10; emphasis added). This understanding of the texts brings us back to the problem of both, what information can we extract from a document—is there any "concrete/objective realty" we are able to reach after "cleaning" the document from elements of a particular representation of reality or ideology?—and, should the historian look for the "credibility" of a source.

Working from a similar point of departure, G. Beckman asked (rhetorically) if we should think that human nature has changed so much over the years; if we should expect ancient Hittite rulers to have had a greater regard for veracity than our contemporaries. He suggests that "in dealing with a cuneiform narrative of purported historical content we ask first of all, Why should this or that statement or implication be true? rather than Why might it be false?" (Beckman, 2005, p. 349). As a result, the methodology proposed by Beckman begins by considering the reason why a text was written; then by attempting to reconstruct the context in which it was created, and to comprehend the dominant ideology of a culture by immersing oneself in the totality of the documentary record, "collating explicit statements of ideals and examining documents written in extreme circumstances, under which the usual ideological filters may have been displaced temporarily." (Beckman, 2005, p. 349). Even though Liverani's idea of dismantling the text from its ideology is present in Beckman's approach to Hittite texts, as I understand it, the latter might consider the sources as evidence for "material reality," more than Liverani probably, as he indicates when observing that "in some respects we can reconstruct a fuller historical context than the contemporary could have done." (Beckman, 2005, p. 347).

After discussing both Liverani and Beckman's methodological approaches (among others), Singer concluded that the postmodernist era may face "...the equally grave danger of total disbelief in everything we read or hear, renouncing almost entirely the possibility of acquiring reliable and objective knowledge about the past and the present." (2011, p. 748; emphasis added). As we were able to observe, albeit briefly, the problem of historiography and research methodology within Hittitological studies is deeper than one would initially expect. Broadly speaking, I believe nobody denies that there existed different interests, aims and motivations behind Hittite compositions that led the scribes to develop the texts in a

certain way, sometimes contradicting what we may define as historical truth. However, as I see it, in order to avoid wandering around in circles between "credibility" and "skepticism" we need to shift the core of the discussion, and try finding answers to the following questions:

1) What is this we call "historical reality?"

2) How do we use the terms *ideology*, *representation* and *propaganda*?

To consider these subjects, I take as a starting point that Hittite texts in general—as manifestations of this specific society and indicators of their interest as well as shared ideas, reflect their representation of the world (or at least, the one of the elite), their beliefs, values, political ideas, etc., all of which constitutes a "historical reality" both *material* and *represented*. I believe, in fact, that M. Merleau-Ponty's ideas on "being-in-the-world" can bring light into this matter (1993, pp. 10-11). As he explains, both elements (human beings and the world) should be understood as constitutive one of another, and thus intertwined in a way that it would be impossible to interpret them separately. Applying these concepts to the analysis of Hittite narratives, I believe it is accurate to think of "facts" (those we can think of as material reality) and "events" (their interpretation/representation) as intertwined too, born together from the beginning, affecting each other, and thus resulting in a highly complex reality which modern researches are not capable of setting apart accurately. In effect, we cannot think of a human fact as taking place independently from anybody's experience and representation of it.

Thus, even if science works by dividing reality to understand it, such methodology seems inaccurate when analyzing how a society constructs its past. I propose instead to take as a premise that historical reality is composed by the interweaving of materiality and representation, and that a proper approach should consider it as such, and not as separate things. From this perspective, the problem with approaches that do not strive to go beyond the narrative itself—in search of the "material occurrence"—comes when the only accessible information is bounded within the "representative" plane, as it could be dissociated from the "material," and vice versa. Returning to Merleau-Ponty's ideas, it is necessary to keep in mind that no representation is prior or independent to the world which affects it, just as representation operates on reality. In other words, when a study focuses by principle on one of the two components of historical reality, it brings us back to the discussion between credibility and skepticism, which seems irreconcilable because the arguments involved tend

to move within their own level of analysis, while reality seems to be much more entwined and complex.

When looking at Liverani's decoding methodology, for instance, what emerges is that prestige and interest played a major role within Near Eastern rulers' practices. This means that, to certain extent, different cultural backgrounds were subordinated, or put into use, in favor of the rulers' aforementioned practical values. As we read: "an intelligent selection of the elements [of the 'real world'] allowed the protagonists to describe reality in the way most appropriate to their cultural background and political aims" (2001, p. 9). As Liverani continues, "the selection of *an interpretive pattern by the political actors themselves is not arbitrary. In order to be plausible and effective*, it must correspond as much as possible with the actual situation, and it must be deeply embedded within the traditional worldview of their country and their culture." (Liverani, 2001, p. 9, emphasis added). Even if it is not always explicit, I believe a fundamental dilemma underlying the analysis of Hittite texts in general is the central attention given to the political discourse from the perspective of its manipulating and distorting qualities used to guarantee an elite's political stability.

Of course prestige and interest are both determinant aspects of any ruler's existence. Still, the problem arises when the content of a document is restricted or subordinated to the primacy of these two values; when the cultural background is considered in terms of its use in respect to the ruler's present and practical needs. If we take this view to its extreme, we might find that a society's (or elite's) worldview becomes independent, conceptually, from the elite's choices and its operations (subordinated to the mentioned political aims), almost as if the rulers weren't interwoven with it too—that is, affected by it. Taking this into account, it is necessary to be precise when using terms such as Hittite ideology, Hittite propaganda and Hittite representation (of the world), and thus to try, as far as it is possible, to determine if we are facing a conscious manipulation of the past (for the ruler's benefit, for instance), if we are dealing with a system of ideas on which a structure of power is supported, or if an evocation of the past is developed on the basis of a religious experience of the world.

A methodology belonging to communication theory will prove, as I understand it, very useful to analyze aspects of Ancient Near Eastern texts—by giving special access to the political dimension of the text—but will not give proper answers to other dimensions of Hittite reality, also present in such and other documents. In effect, a difficult aspect in analyzing Hittite text is that the limits between the political and the religious are not very clear. In accordance, I propose to examine both as sharing the same level of importance, since,

as far as Hittite documents are concerned, non of these dimensions appear clearly more important than the other.

I would like to consider, as an example, Hittite state treaties, which, with few exceptions, incorporate an introduction that provides an overview of past relations between the contracting parts.[2] As observed by Singer (2014, p. 897, p. 899) "the various perceptions of the *raison d'être* of the historical introductions may roughly be divided into three conceptual categories, which may conveniently be designated as ethical, legal and propagandistic." These approaches—which usually overlap and fuse—share (as Singer also indicates) deep doubts on the historical credibility of said "historical introductions." Thus, if we come to doubt the preambles' truthfulness, how are we to proceed with the rest of the document? For instance, shall we start methodologically by disbelieving that the Hittites included the gods to truly warrant that the pact remains unbroken? Wouldn't this procedure presuppose that the political practice (and the manipulation it can involve) was superior in importance to the Hittite governing elite than their religious beliefs? As I see it, this view introduces an *a priori* conception which was not necessarily the one shared by this society (or elite).

One should also note that, even if in other documents at our disposal we find that critical situations (such as plagues) were believed to be caused by the breaking of a treaty and the god's rage (cf. Singer, 2014, pp. 905-906), this does not seem to be enough information to guarantee that the Hittites, when controlling other rulers, territories and the corresponding population, did not use this religious discourse to execute their power. Singer indicated in this regard that "the fear for punishment for an unjustified aggression or break of oath is not seriously taken into account in current interpretations, in which only prestige and interest may explain human behavior." (2014, p. 912). An alternative could be using an approach that examines the document in parts, analyzing the historical prologue as involving most probably the Hittite interest and its associated view of the past (i.e. according to a present concern), and the section including Hittite beliefs as representing what the Hittites truly believed. From any standing point, I understand that being methodologically cautious here means that we take into account that even disbelieving the narrative *a priori* may lead us to tilt the balance of our analysis, and give paramount to political motivations over religious ones, and subordinate the second to the first, when no other attestation for that might exist. Hittite treaties are, of

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[2] On this specific topic: Zaccagnini, 1990, p.46ff; Altman, 2004a, 2004b; Devecchi, 2008. For an updated and complete analysis of treaties in the Ancient Near East, see Devecchi 2015.

course, one example we have of the way this society constructed of the past, but there are many others.

In effect, lots of scholars have contributed to the study of Hittite historiography (see del Monte, 1993, p. vii, footnote 1; de Martino, 2003a, p. 9, footnote 1, Corti, 2005, p. 113, footnote 1, for a selection of these contributions), shedding light on the intrinsic difficulties of typologically framing Hittite historiographical texts—see, e.g. Hoffner, 1980, p. 323ff; Mora, 1999; de Martino 2003a, 9ff; 2005, pp. 143-278). In following Hoffner's classification, we would find at least five groups of texts that include a narrative of the past: I- Texts which narrate military campaigns classified yearly; II- Texts which refer to one or more military operations within a single year, which also include a mythological elaboration (e.g. the Cannibal text, and the Siege of Uršu); III- Texts that narrate negative actions of the royal family or administrative functionaries; IV- Texts describing how a usurper acceded to the throne (e.g. Telipinu Proclamation); and V- Historical narratives in: a) treaties or edict prologues, and b) royal prayers (Hoffner, 1980). To these groups, as suggested by C. Mora (1999, p. 24), one may also add one composed by monumental royal inscriptions written in hieroglyphs, which belong to the last Hittite sovereigns and describes military campaigns.

Also important to ordering Hittite historiographical production for its modern study (specifically historiography of the Old Kingdom) has been de Martino's classification of the texts into the three following branches, to wit: "(1) gli "Annali"—which are constituted by the presentation of the events year per year, (2) the "*Res Gestae*"—composed by narratives which also present a chronological order, but where the event is not introduced by the expression *wittantanni* "in that year," "in the following year," but the phrase *mān parā šiyati* "when spring arrived," and finally, (3) the *"Res Gestae* del sovrano estensore del documento con una rassegna delle imprese di suoi predecessor"—constituted by texts that narrated events which happened before its sovereign author (de Martino, 2005, pp. 143-144). As can be noted, the multiple categorization of the documents respond to the vast amount of texts to which the Hittites incorporated narratives of their past.

Throughout these texts two aspects (at least) lead the historiographical debate: one concerns the "primary sources" used by the Hittites in narrating a certain past, and the other concerns the aforementioned document's aims. With regards to the former, the problem became extremely difficult to solve because, even if some texts indicate that research in the archive was done, such texts (if they ever existed) did not survive—e.g. the Second Prayer for the Plague of Muršili II, where the cause of the plague is indicated to be found in an ancient

tablet (Mora, 1999, p. 26). In accordance, Hoffner suggested a hypothetical explanation, where such "primary sources" were wax-covered wood tablets—which appear mentioned in the Hittite cuneiform sources. Unfortunately, as he also explains, there is no documentary evidence that the Hittite "wood scribes" copied historical texts (Hoffner, 1980, p. 285)

With respect to the sources' aim, as mentioned before, it was broadly considered that the Hittites, in contrast to other societies of the ancient Near East, had an interest in history *per se* (see Mora, 1999, p. 27). It was H. Cancik (1970 and 1976) who indicated that the Hittites developed a "proper historiography" (*eigentliche Geschichtsschreibung*) (see Singer, 2011, p. 738; see van Seters 1983, p. 102ff). As a result of the 70's analytical changes, we find analysis taking more of a middle ground, emphasizing both the "pretended objectivity" of the source— understood as "oggettiva, giornalistica"—as well as its propagandistic role—i.e. as vehicle "per la propaganda e l'espressione dell'ideologia regia" (del Monte, 1993, p. 12; see Mora, 1999, p. 28; Polvani 2003, p. 282). Mostly, however, we may find studies that consider the aforementioned sources to be essentially propagandistic.

In the early 80's Hoffner posited that an attitude or methods alike those used by Thucydides should not be expected among Hittite historiographers, since texts such as treaties were not disinterested inquiries of the Hittite king into the causes of a present situation. On the contrary, these and other documents (like the Telepinu Proclamation or the Apology of Hattušili III) do not amount to historiography in the strict sense but as 'works of sheer propaganda' (1980, p. 322); this view is also shared by Mora, who after highlighting the propagandistic nature of documents alike—whose intention were to legitimate and justify the ruler's actions (not narrating "real facts")—, finds difficulties in defining them as historiographical (Mora, 1999). Three years later both J. van Seters and H. G. Güterbock made their contributions to this subject as well. The first one indicated that "in the study of Hittite historiography the criterion of *historicity does not play a major role*, as it did for Mesopotamia, because there are no genres, such as historical omen texts or chronicles, that contain disinterested historical statements" (1983, p. 100; emphasis added). On the contrary, van Seters emphasized the Hittites were kind to use historical persuasion (1983, p. 122).

H. G. Güterbock looked also at the difficulties of defining Hittite attitude to history, answering in a very different way, by indicating that the Hittites did not produce neither a Herodotus nor a Thucydides, and that "if this standard is employed, there is no point in arguing. But we should not apply extraneous standards to a period and a civilization to which they are not applicable. Leaving them aside, *we shall see that the Hittite historical texts have*

merits of their own" (1983, p. 171, emphasis added). Güterbock insisted on the fact that if one defines historiography as writing history for its own sake the majority of the texts would be excluded; however, he also posited the Hittites did in fact come close (especially in texts like Annals) to even such "real" historiography.

Looking through Hittite Annals as well, and contrary to their propagandistic and legitimating nature, A. M. Polvani indicated that "un ulteriore indizio che gli Annali non siano solo 'a defense of the young king's manhood", un testo scritto per legittimare il re e il propio potere, come sostenuto da Hoffner, ma anche un testo che vuole 'narrare' (*non fare storia, o raccontare la verità*) è dimostrato a mio parere anche dall'epilogo degli Annali decennali in cui si legge 'Quello inoltre che via via mi darà il Sole d'Arinna, mia signora, lo redigerò e lo depositerò (di fronte alla dea)." (2005, p. 283). With regards to the propagandisctic nature usually assigned to official texts, I find it interesting to keep in mind what Th. van den Hout observes:

> Hittite annalistic prose in which kings tell of their *res gestae* certainly depict the king's wisdom and military skills but hardly his prowess in battle. It would have been true propaganda if these compositions had been disseminated in any way by, for instance, public readings but the real *Sitz im Leben* of these texts is a much-debated problem. It is interesting to see that some of the few cuneiform instances that do sound unabashedly propagandistic contain hints at public display and can be seen as either copies or drafts of inscriptions. (van den Hout, 2006, p. 221).

To contribute to the analysis of the quality of Hittite historiographical sources in terms of their content, reliability, functions and intentions, in 2001, J. Klingel turned back to these matters (2001, p. 275). Then, he indicated that even if no one would expect Hittite historiography to fulfill modern standards of objectivity, other key problems surface anyway, especially methodological ones, when we find ourselves constrained to interpret an event from Hittite sources alone—locking the researcher in a one-dimensional perspective, as happens most of the time, when there are other ways of verifying their "correctness" (2001, p. 275). In accordance, Klinger proposes that the presence of different stylistic forms (such as *topos*) give meaningful clues to how to interpret the documents. For instance, the texts that narrate that the Hittites were attacked from behind ("von hinten") or in the back ("im Rücken") would hint towards a way of diminishing the king's responsibility with regards to the events (2001, pp. 289-290). This way of justifying military facts leads Klinger to interpret that such events must have been real, but the reason provided may be fictional (2001, p. 291; cf. Singer, 2011, pp. 742-747). As I understand it, the presence of topical features or recurrent formulaic expressions in Ancient Near Eastern texts is not under discussion; what still is, though, is their interpretation and meaning. In this regard, I find Singer's observations about

these linguistic forms not necessarily speaking against the credibility of a source interesting (2001, p. 744, and quote 131).

Following this train of thought, I would like to focus now on a different kind of construction of the past we find in texts which mostly narrate military accounts (i.e. Hoffner's group II) but including a mythological elaboration; texts usually define as "mitico-leggendario o storico-epico" or as a combination of "Historischem und Mythologischem" (respectively: Corti, 2005, pp. 113-114; Gilan, 2004, p. 264). 1). In this group we find: the Puḫanu Chronicle; 2) the Zalpa Text; 3) the Cannibal Text, and 4) the Uršu Siege. From the historiographical and methodological point of view, these are documents which probably represent even a bigger challenge, where "historical" and "mythological" features are combined—although, in very different ways, according to each text. The first document (The Puḫanu Chronicle), which dates possibly to Hattušili I's reign, broadly narrates how the Hittites made their way into Syria, but also, as indicated by Beckman, provides with "an etiology for the existence of a pass through the Taurus mountains between Anatolia and Syria." (2005, p. 263). In accordance, this chronicle has been defined as epical, but also as a historical text (respectively Beckman, 2005, p. 263; Soysal, 1987, p. 195).

To further illustrate how porous modern standards are to define Hittite texts, de Martino and F. Imparati detected that the Puḫanu Chronicle would also include "…a ritual portion that refers to events that actually happened. In the first part, the text might refer to a rite performed through a king's "substitute" in order to purify the sovereign of an action that had provoked the wrath of the gods. (…). A rite performed precisely in order to win back the favor of the gods." (2003b, p. 263). As A. Gilan synthetizes, the document presents problems whether we focus on its specific passages, or on its meaning as a whole—"Es ist jedoch weniger das Verständnis der verschiedenen Passagen, sondern die Deutung von CTH 16 als Ganzes, die meines Erachtens noch einer tiefergehenden Betrachtung bedarf." (2004, p. 264).

The Cannibal Text, also located in Syria, is a document as fascinating as it is fragmentary. In the first legible lines, for instance, we read "1-5 …What person ar[rives] among them, they always eat him up. When they see a fa[t] man, they kill him and eat him up." (first part of column ii, KBo 3.60; Gilan's translation, 2008, p. 272). As Gilan indicates, in analyzing this text modern scholars seem to be dealing with the difficulty of distinguishing between fact and fiction, since "it is precisely the mixture of apparently historical and fictional elements in the same text that impedes scholarly interpretation of the 'cannibal text'" (2008, p. 273), a question that Gilan also found difficult to solve. Because of the historical background it

exhibits, several scholars have interpreted KBo 3.60 as work of historiography, while others, following Güterbock, define it as a fictional text (see Gilan, 2008, p. 273). In this scenario, Gilan concludes, contrary to both approaches, that "it is not possible to answer the questions as to whether a tribe of cannibals existed in Syria of the Middle Bronze Age, and whether the audience of the cannibal text believed in their existence, with any certainty." (2008, p. 278).

The third document belonging to this group, the Uršu Text, presents the encirclement of the city of Uršu by the Hittites, centered in anecdotes and activities of Hittite officers, which also include humor. As observed by Beckman, an extensive attribution of speeches to the main actors establishes that we are dealing with an effort to interpret the course of events, as he puts it, with historiography (1995, p. 31). Within Beckman's analysis of the Uršu Text we also find his general opinion about Hittite construction of the past; as we read "…the basic function of all Hittite historiography was the justification of the office of kingship, as well as of its current incumbent, in the eyes of both gods and men." (1995, p. 33; for a full analysis of the text, see Beckman 1995).

Moreover, in the Zalpa Text, the fourth document under this group, we find a narrative that linked the Hittite capital to the most important centers of power of Anatolia: Kaneš and Zalpa. As Hoffner puts it, "this story serves as the introduction to a sehimistorical account of political relations between the early Hittite state and the city of Zalpa on the Black Sea." (1998, p. 81). In accordance, the travel of the 30 sons of the Queen of Kaneš is explained by the fact that "nell'immaginario colletivo era la sede della dinastia più importante di cui si avesse ricordo in Anatolia, ed erano gli eredi di tale stirpe; ma la regalità ittita veniva da Zalpa dove i dei avevano salvato I bambini…" (Corti, 2005, p. 117). As Corti highlights, in comparison to other texts—e.g. the Cannibal Text and the Puḫanu Chronicle), the "mythical sections" do not appear in the middle of the text, but at the beginning, expressing its foundation role and showing us this is an atypical document; which could be described as the foundational story of a reign (Corti, 2005). It is important to note that texts usually defined as mythical or myth-and-ritual documents have been also considered to be etiological explanations of the origins of Hittite state (i.e. Telipinu's myth, Gonnet, 1990; 2001).

In effect, mythological texts—such as the ones named *mugawar/mugeššar*, *uddar* and SÌR—display a reconstruction of a certain past as well. For instance, if we take the aforementioned *mugawar* of the god Telipinu, which narrates this deity's rage and disappearance, we will find that the narrative uses verbs in preterite—as we find at the beginning of the first preserved paragraph, the verbs are in 3rd person singular, *pait* (went),

BÀD-*it*? (fortified), [§1'] 1-6, CTH 324.1, cf. Riecken, 2012). However, as the ritual section approaches, some verbs change to the present-future—e.g. *kitta* (lies) [§20''] 129-131, *tēzzi* "says" [§26''] 162, *talugay*[*a*? "are seating/seat" [§31''] 198; CTH 324.1, cf. Riecken, 2012—with other actions making reference to an immediate past—e.g. *warnunun* "burned" [§27''] 169; CTH 324.1, cf. Riecken, 2012. Sometimes we find a *mugawar* (CTH 322, §1, 1'; Riecken, 2009) where the expression *karū* "early; formerly; earlier; already; hitherto, up to now" (HED K, p. 112; Kloekhorst, 2008, p. 458) opposite to *kinun* "now" is present, probably meaning "long ago"—Hoffner (1998, p. 26)—and giving us the idea that what is told also happened in the past. In the Illuyanka myth, not only do we read the narrative is according to the GUDU-priest (who narrates the story); we also find the use of the temporal or conditional conjunction *ma-a-an*; "*mān .... argatiyēr*" / "When....fought" (§2, 8; CTH 321). In accordance, both mentioned details give the idea that the events narrated by the priest of the Storm God of Nerik) began when (by the time) the Storm god fought in Kiskilušša with Illuyanka. As in other cases, when the ritual part of the text becomes clearer, we note again a change in the tense—e.g. *anda aranzi* (they arrive) (§30'', 117; CTH 321; cf. Riecken, 2012).

Unfortunately, it is not possible to give a detailed review of this kind of texts here (whose characteristics in respect to others just discussed are, of course, evident if we take into consideration that their main actors are gods). However, I believe it is important to highlight they also constitute a way of constructing a past, which, as in other aforementioned texts, is highly connected to present circumstances—as we can tell by most of these texts practical use in ritual and festival activities, from which we may exclude those of Hurrian origin. All in all, at the time of approaching how "the Hittites" narrated the past—especially if we consider they did not have an interest in history *per se*—, modern standards are not applicable. It also seems that other texts, such as the myths just mentioned, are valuable and should be put under the microscope of narrative constructions of the past.

Conclusions

My efforts to contribute to the study of Hittite historiography focused here on evaluating some of the most significant approaches on the subject, as well as to problematize them from a theoretical perspective. As a result, I indicated that probably one of the most problematic aspects of the discussion of Hittite constructions of the past is the irreconcilable division made between the two analytical dimensions, i.e. material reality and representation/interpretation.

Accordingly, I propose to look for methodologies (such as the suggested adaptation of some of Merleau-Ponty's concepts) that allow us to encompass the analysis of a historical reality as composed by these two dimensions as a complex interweaving of materiality and representation. As a result, I believe it necessary to integrate different theoretical tools that allow the researcher to attend the different dimensions of Hittite texts, which they display already by themselves. As simple as it sounds, I consider the articulation and critical use of broader theoretical concepts to analyze Hittite documents in general would make for an important contribution to the present debate, where no other theoretical framework of the magnitude of Liverani's has appeared yet.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

CHD = H.G. Güterbock, H.A. Hoffner, Th. P. J. van den Hout (edd.), *The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Chicago, 1983ff.
CTH = E. Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites*, Paris, 1971 (with suppl. in *Revue hittite et asianique* 30, 1972, 94-133 and *Revue hittite et asianique* 32, 1973, 68-71).
GHL = Hoffner, H. A Jr. and C. Melchert, 2008. A Grammar of the Hittite Language, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
HED = J. Puhvel, *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*, Berlin – New York, 1984ff.
IBoT= *İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzelerinde Bulunan Boğazköy Tabletleri*, Istanbul, 1944-1988.
KBo = *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy*, Osnabrück / Berlin, 1923ff.
KUB = *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy*, Berlin, 1921-1990.

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