

The Eastern Mediterranean Epic Tradition from *Bilgames and Akka* to the *Song of Release* to Homer's *Iliad*

Mary R. Bachvarova

IN 1983 the first pieces were found of a new story, the bilingual Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release*, in Houses 15 and 16 of the “Oberstadt” of Hattusa (Boğazköy). Martin West was unable to take much of the text into account in his masterly study of the connections between Near Eastern and Greek poetry, *The East Face of Helicon*, because the complete edition of the work by Erich Neu appeared only in 1996.¹ These tablets

¹ M. L. West, *East Face of Helicon* (Oxford 1997) 75 n.60, did mention the parables in the story. The text is edited by E. Neu, *Das hurritische Epos der Freilassung I: Untersuchungen zu einem hurritisch-hethitischen Textensemble aus Hattuša* (Wiesbaden 1996), who provided a translation of all the coherent fragments. All citations from the *Song of Release* follow Neu's edition unless otherwise noted. All translations are my own. A near complete translation into English may be found in H. A. Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths*² (Atlanta 1998) 65–80; partial translations are G. Wilhelm, “The Hurrians in the Western Parts of the Ancient Near East,” *Michmanim* 9 (1996) 17–30, G. Beckman in W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger (eds.), *The Context of Scripture I Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden 1997) 216–217, A. Ünal in K. Hecker et al. (eds.), *Mythen und Epen II (Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments 3.4 [Gütersloh 1994])* 860–865, and G. Wilhelm in M. Dietrich et al. (eds.), *Ergänzungslieferung (Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments [Gütersloh 2001])* 82–91. My own interpretation differs in some important details however from these works. I defend this interpretation in “Relations between God and Man in the Hurro-Hittite ‘Song of Release,’” *JAOs* (forthcoming), using phraseological and thematic correspondences between the *Song of Release* and various Hittite texts (treaties, administrative texts, annals, prayers, and other Hurro-Hittite songs) to argue that the *Song of Release* is not about releasing debt slaves (so Hoffner and others) but about releasing captives. This point has already been argued from a different angle by E. Otto, “*Kirenzi* und *d-rôr* in der hurritisch-hethitischen Serie ‘Freilassung’ (*parā* □

will in fact prove very valuable to all those interested in studying the development of ancient “epic”—traditional narrative poetry about gods and men—around the Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age. Even the few fragments that we have are filled with “Homeric” motifs drawn from the same Near Eastern literary tradition which apparently was familiar to many Greek poets in some form or another; the *Song of Release* can thus shed new light on how the themes, plot lines, motifs, and formulae of courtly epic could have been translated and transmitted from the larger Near East to Greek-speakers, providing us with an example of how the wider Near Eastern epic tradition was transported across linguistic barriers and adapted to the particular interests of a new milieu.

The tablets of the *Song of Release* are laid out with the Hurrian original on the left side and the Hittite translation on the right. Among the fragments a few colophons are preserved which tell us that the text was a SIR₃ *parā tarumarš* “Song of Release” (*Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi* [KBo] 32.11, 13, 15, 19, 66), performed (at some point in its history) by a ^{LÚ}NAR, a male singer (colophons of 13, 66).² The SIR₃, or “song,” was a Hittite genre that included songs about Kumarbi, Silver, Gilgamesh, and Kešši, and the *Song of Release* uses phraseology and motifs found in these works.³ The epic motifs discernable in the *Song of*

tarumarš,” in G. Wilhelm (ed.), *Akten des IV. Internationalen Kongresses für Hethitologie* (Wiesbaden 2001) 524–531.

² See E. Neu, “Knechtschaft und Freiheit,” in B. Janowski, K. Koch, and G. Wilhelm (eds.), *Religionsgeschichtliche Beziehungen zwischen Kleinasien, Nordsyrien und dem Alten Testament* (Göttingen 1993) 329–361, at 330–331, and M. Schuol, “Zur Überlieferung homerischer Epen vor dem Hintergrund altanatolischer Traditionen,” in M. Schuol, U. Hartmann, and A. Luther (eds.), *Grenzüberschreitungen: Formen des Kontakts zwischen Orient und Okzident im Altertum* (Stuttgart 2002) 331–363, at 336–340. Some five or six tablets in total present coherent passages. Fifteen or sixteen more smaller pieces give us tantalizing glimpses of other parts of the narrative and about 100 more even smaller pieces add little else to our knowledge, but indicate that the text was very repetitious.

³ M. Bachvarova, *From Hittite to Homer: The Role of Anatolians in the Transmission of Epic and Prayer Motifs from the Ancient Near East to the Ancient Greeks* (diss. Univ. Chicago 2002) 120–128, and E. Neu, “Kešše-Epos und Epos der Freilassung,” *SMEA* 31 (1993) 111–120.

Release include the proemium (11), the assembly scene (15, 16, 19), a hospitality sequence (13, 46, 65, 72, 209),⁴ and waking for a message (37).⁵

This paper focuses primarily on the assembly scene in the light of other Near Eastern narratives and the *Iliad*, comparing in detail the assembly scene of the *Song of Release* with the *Iliad* and then briefly discussing parallels from the Sumerian *Bilgames and Akka*, 1 Kings 12 from the Bible, and the Old Babylonian creation epic *Atrahasis*. This comparative discussion shows how motifs were reworked and inverted to create new plots from traditional material and demonstrates that the assembly scene in the *Song of Release* stands midway between Greek and Near Eastern epic, for the very Greek motif of two human speakers arguing before an assembly of other humans, although built up out of stock Near Eastern motifs, does not appear with all its parts in any other Near Eastern narrative poem.

One tablet of the *Song of Release* is nearly complete; it contains a series of parables in the tradition of Aesop's fables and *A Thousand and One Nights*, a tradition with biblical parallels as well.⁶ The narrative as a whole seems to be divided between parables and a less well preserved plot line telling of the fall of Ebla. As yet it is unclear how these parables are connected to the rest of the plot, and Wilhelm has even suggested that they do not belong to the same text at all.⁷ The destruction of the town seems to be blamed on the divine wrath of the Hurrian storm-god Tešsub, angered when the Eblaites refused to release certain captives, people of the town Ikinkalis. This town in North Syria was conquered in approximately 1600 B.C. by the Old Hittite king Hattusili I or his successor Mursili I.⁸ The song

⁴ See Bachvarova, *Hittite to Homer* 107–116; S. Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Ann Arbor 1993); West, *East Face* 201–203; and compare especially the embassy to Achilles in *Iliad* 9.185–224.

⁵ Bachvarova, *Hittite to Homer* 116–120; West, *East Face* 185–193, 229; I. McNeill, "The Metre of the Hittite Epic," *AnatSt* 13 (1963) 237–242, at 241.

⁶ See Hoffner, *Hittite Myths* 70.

⁷ In Dietrich, *Ergänzungslieferung* 84–85.

⁸ See H. Klengel, *Syria: 3000 to 300 B.C.: A Handbook of Political History* (Berlin 1992) 80–83.

thus may be interpreted as providing an after-the-fact justification for the conquest.⁹ As Neu himself pointed out, the Hurrian version of the song could have been imported during the Old Hittite period, when the Hittites were actively campaigning in North Syria and conquered both Ebla and Ikinkalis, although its palaeography and grammar indicate that the song was written down and translated into Hittite in the Middle Hittite period (1500–1400 B.C.).¹⁰

As has been pointed out already, the poem opens in a manner typical of Eastern Mediterranean hymns and epics from the Sumerian Ur III *Hymn to Gilgamesh* to the Akkadian *Creation Epic* to the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Silver* to the Homeric hymns and epics (KBo 32.11 i 1–13, preserved only in Hurrian):¹¹

I shall sing of Teššub, great lord of Kummi
 I shall exalt the lady
 Allani, at the doorbolt of the earth
 And along with them I shall tell
 of the lady Ishara, the word-maker,
 speaker of wisdom, god.

⁹ See V. Haas and I. Wegner, “Baugrube und Fundament,” *IstMitt* 43 (1993) 57, and E. Neu, “La bilingue hurro-hittite de Hattusha, contenu et sens,” in J.-M. Durand (ed.), *Amurru: I Mari, Ebla et les hurrites: Dix ans de travaux* (Paris 1996) 189–195, at 192–193.

¹⁰ Neu, *Epos* 483 and 3–7.

¹¹ H. A. Hoffner, Jr., “The Song of Silver: A Member of the Kumarbi Cycle of ‘Songs,’” in E. Neu and C. Rüster (eds.), *Documentum Asiae Minoris Antiquae: Festschrift für Heinrich Otten* (Wiesbaden 1988) 143–166; S. de Martino, “Il ‘Canto della liberazione’: Composizione letteraria bilingue hurro-hittita sulla distruzione de Ebla,” *ParPass* 55 (2000) 296–320, at 300–301; and Schuol, *Grenzüberschreitungen* 331, 336–337. Also see C. Wilcke, “Die Anfänge der akkadischen Epen,” *ZA* 67 (1977) 153–207, at 153–155, 175–186, 200–202; West, *East Face* 170–173; and B. De Vries, *The Style of Hittite Epic and Mythology* (diss. Brandeis 1967) 127–134, on proemia. A new fragment of the opening of the Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* epic shows that it does not contain the “I sing ...” opening which has frequently been restored for it: T. Kwasman, “A New Join to the Epic of Gilgameš Tablet I,” *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 89 (1998) #99, and transl. of A. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (London 1999) 1.

I shall tell of Pizikarra ... Ebla ...
 who will bring ... Pizikarra will des[troy (?)] ...
 Nuhašše ... and Ebla ...
 Pizikarra, the Ninevan ...
 he bound (participle, absolute case)
 ... bound ...
 ... with the gods ...

Between the opening preserved in KBo 32.11 and the assembly scene a series of parables told by an intradiegetic narrator seems to intervene. These warn of the consequences of insubordination, greed, and arrogance, but the advice proffered does not seem to have been followed by the characters in the main narrative. Perhaps they may be compared to the story told by Phoenix and ignored by Achilles in the embassy to Achilles in *Iliad* 9.531–605.¹²

The key scene to be discussed here appears in KBo 32.16 and 15. A short passage in 16 introduces us to one of the protagonists, Zazalla, the opponent in assembly of the king Meki. The rest of 16 is very damaged, but the beginning of 15, the fifth tablet of the *Song of Release*, duplicates the end of 16. Here Zazalla seems to be the one who argues that if Teššub were in want, each would contribute whatever he might need; if someone were depriving the god, the Eblaites would mitigate Teššub's suffering (KBo 32.15 ii 4'–9'):

[If Teš]šub is injured by oppression
 and he [a]sks [for release], if Teššub
 [is o]ppressed, each will g[i]ve to Teššub
 [one shekel of silver.]
 Ea[ch] will give half a shekel [of gold], [we will each g]ive to h[im]
 of silver
 [one shekel]. But, if he, Teššub, is hungry,
 we will each give one measure of barley [to the g]od.

¹² For an interpretation of the text that unites the parable section and the Ebla section under the single theme of insubordination, see Otto, *Akten* 524–531.

Zazalla speaks harshly to Meki (ii 20'–24'):

For you, Meki,
 does your heart rejoice inside?
 First of all, for you, Meki, your heart inside
 will not rejoice. Secondly,
 for Purra, who is to be given back, his heart inside will <not>
 rejoice.

Under no circumstances however will the Eblaites let Purra and the sons of the town Ikinkalis go, because they and their kings need them to do their menial labor. Meki should send his own slaves and his own wife and children (ii 26'–iii 6):

Why will we let them go
 And who will give us food? They are our cupbearers,
 and they give out. They are our cooks,
 and they wash for us.
 And the thread which they spin is [thick]
 like the hair [of an ox.]
 But if for you releasing [is desirable,]
 re[lease] your male and female servants!
 Surrender your son! [Your] wife [...]
 send! (...)

Meki seems helpless against Zazalla. He turns to Teššub, falling at his feet and telling of his city's refusal and trying to avoid any blame—and here our tablet breaks off (iii 13–20):

“Listen to me Teššub,
 great king of Kummi.
 I will [gi]ve it, (i.e.) *pařiššan*,
 but m[y c]ity will not give it.
 And Zazalla, son of Pazz[anik]arri,
 won't give release.” Meki
 (tried to?) purify his ci[ty] from sin,
 the ci[ty of Eb]la. He (tried to?) waive the sins for the sake of his
 city ...

I translate the preterites *parkunūt* (19) and *peššiyet* (20) as “(tried to?)” because it seems that Meki is unable to prevent the destruction of his city when the Eblaite assembly refuses to release the captives, as Teššub himself had demanded (KBo 32.19–20).

The introductory description of Zazalla presents interesting parallels to the stock characterization of speakers in the *Iliad* (KBo 32.16 ii 1–13 with 32.54, 59):

[... there is no] one who speaks against him
 [...] among the elders, there is no one
 who speaks against him.
 [There is no one] who makes a response to him.
 [No] one talks.

But if there is one who speaks greatly in the city,
 whose words no one
 turns aside, Zazalla is the one who speaks greatly.
 In the place of assembly, his words
 no one overcomes.

[Zazal]la began to speak to Meki,
 “Why [do you] speak humility,
 star of Ebla, Me[ki]...?”

This description of Zazalla is similar to that of Thoas in the *Iliad* (15.283–284): “In the assembly few of the Achaeans bested him when the young men competed with words” (ἀγορῆ δέ ἐ παῦροι Ἀχαιῶν νίκων, ὅπποτε κοῦροι ἐρίσσειαν περὶ μύθων). The comment of Nestor to Diomedes is equally apropos (9.54–56):¹³

καὶ βουλῆ μετὰ πάντας ὁμήλικας ἔπλευ ἄριστος.
 οὐ τίς τοι τὸν μῦθον ὀνόσσειται ὅσσοι Ἀχαιοί,
 οὐδὲ πάλιν ἐρέει

in council among all your peers you are the best,
 no one will fault your speech, as many are the Achaeans,
 nor will (any one) speak against it.

¹³ On this formulaic description of the able speaker see K. Dickson, *Nestor: Poetic Memory in Greek Epic* (New York 1995) 12. All quotations from the *Iliad* follow Monro and Allen’s text (Oxford 1920).

Zazalla is in fact the first human example of the “excellent speaker in assembly” that I have found.

But whereas Nestor and the other great Greek speakers were conciliators speaking the truth, Zazalla is antagonistic, arguing against king Meki and in the wrong. In some ways he is more like the famed Iliadic fluent but unwise speaker Thersites, who attempts to turn the assembly of Argives against their leaders, criticizing Agamemnon.¹⁴ Like Zazalla, Thersites dares to speak rudely to a leader of the people. But the positions of the two speakers are inverted in relation to each other. In contrast to Zazalla, Thersites speaks the truth but too plainly, complaining that Agamemnon should be satisfied with what he has already won and that he has gone too far in insulting Achilles (*Il.* 2.225–242). Thersites fails to persuade the assembly and is silenced ignominiously by Odysseus. Zazalla, on the other hand, is respected by the assembly of Ebla. He is able to sway the assembly to his side despite Meki’s opposition, yet his advice proves to be wrong.

We turn now to the beginning of the *Iliad* to see how the themes that appear in the debate scene of the *Song of Release* are reworked for a Greek audience. The *Iliad* opens with two consecutive debates in an assembly over freeing Chryseis, the daughter of a local priest of Apollo. The priest first offers a ransom in return, but Agamemnon refuses his request. In this narrative sequence appear many of the motifs found in the assembly scene of the *Song of Release*: a request to release a captive which is refused, a pleader in contact with his god, an assembly, and an unwise speaker who carries the day to his people’s detriment. In the *Song of Release*, a man in close contact with his god, the king Meki, seems to present the god’s request in assembly that captives should be freed, but the assembly is persuaded by another of its leaders to go against the word of the king and keep the captives to work for them. In the *Iliad*, on the other hand, the captive is the pleader’s own daughter, and the pleader is the one who will rouse the god to anger on his behalf. When the priest of Apollo comes to plead his case, he does not serve as the god’s representative. Only after the priest

¹⁴ See *Il.* 2.212–224 and discussion in Dickson, *Nestor* 27, 51–52.

is rejected does Apollo become involved at his request. It is Chalcas at the instigation of Achilles who makes an attempt to divine the god's thoughts and states correctly that he is angered specifically over the captive Chryseis. The Greek assembly expresses its opinion, but has no control over the final decision. Meki, on the other hand, wishes to avoid the wrath of Teššub, who himself demands the release of the captives. King Agamemnon, going against the opinion of his assembly, refuses the priest's request, saying that he enjoys the captive woman's services, and sends the priest away harshly (1.26–32):

μή σε, γέρον, κοίλησιν ἐγὼ παρὰ νηυσὶ κιχείω
 ἢ νῦν δηθύνοντ' ἢ ὕστερον αὐτίς ἰόντα,
 μή νύ τοι οὐ χραίσμη σκῆπτρον καὶ στέμμα θεοῖο·
 τὴν δ' ἐγὼ οὐ λύσω· πρὶν μιν καὶ γῆρας ἔπεισιν
 ἡμετέρῳ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, ἐν Ἄργεϊ, τηλόθι πάτρης,
 ἴστων ἐποιχομένην καὶ ἐμὸν λέχος ἀντιώσαν·
 ἀλλ' ἴθι, μή μ' ἐρέθιζε, σαώτερος ὡς κε νήηαι.

Let me not meet you, old man, by the hollow ships,
 either lingering now or coming back again in the future,
 lest your staff and fillet of god fail to protect you.
 I will not release her, rather old age will come upon her
 in my house in Argos, far from her fatherland,
 going back and forth before the loom, and sharing my bed;
 but go, don't annoy me, so that you may go safer.

In the *Iliad* Chryses then calls upon Apollo, using the same persuasive techniques that his Near Eastern colleagues would, reminding him of the services he has provided the god.¹⁵

The plague sent by Apollo devastates the Greek host, and finally another assembly is called to ferret out the source of impurity that has provoked this disaster at the hands of Apollo. Now Achilles attempts to address the situation in terms very similar to those a Hittite or an Akkadian would use, wondering at first if Apollo feels slighted by the Greeks' neglect, and re-

¹⁵ *Il.* 1.33–42, and see West, *East Face* 348, 273.

questing that an omen be sought (*Il.* 1.53–67).¹⁶ It is revealed that Apollo is angered over the insult to his priest, and Achilles argues successfully against Agamemnon, forcing him to give the girl up. Agamemnon however insists that he be compensated for the loss of his concubine, and threatens to take one from someone else (131–139):

μὴ δ' οὕτως, ἀγαθός περ ἔων, θεοείκελ' Ἀχιλλεῦ,
κλέπτε νόφ, ἐπεὶ οὐ παρελεύσεαι οὐδέ με πείσεις.
ἢ ἐθέλεις ὄφρ' αὐτὸς ἔχῃς γέρας, αὐτὰρ ἔμ' αὐτὸς
ἦσθαι δευόμενον, κέλειαι δέ με τῆνδ' ἀποδοῦναι;
ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν δώσουσι γέρας μεγάθυμοι Ἀχαιοί,
ἄρσαντες κατὰ θυμόν, ὅπως ἀντάξιον ἔσται·
εἰ δέ κε μὴ δώωσιν, ἐγὼ δέ κεν αὐτὸς ἔλωμαι
ἢ τεὸν ἢ Αἴαντος ἰὼν γέρας, ἢ Ὀδυσῆος
ἄξω ἑλών· ὁ δέ κεν κεχολώσεται ὄν κεν ἴκωμαι.

Don't in this way, noble though you may be, god-like Achilles,
try to deceive with cleverness, since you will neither divert me nor
persuade me.

Do you indeed wish, while you yourself hold a prize, for me to sit
here

lacking one? Do you order me to give her back?

But if the great-hearted Achaeans will give the prize,
choosing according to wish, so that it will be compensation—

if they don't give, I myself will go choose

either your prize or, Ajax', or Odysseus',

I will take and lead away; he will be angered, whom I visit.

The subject and phrasing of Agamemnon's assertions to Chryses and Achilles have interesting similarities to Zazalla's declaration in the *Song of Release*. Agamemnon declares to Achilles that he will take another's captive in compensation, just as Zazalla suggests angrily that Meki give up his own ser-

¹⁶ Compare the Hittite *Kantuzzili's Prayer*, transl. I. Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (Atlanta 2002) 31–36, itself based on Mesopotamian hymns to the Sun-god, and the Akkadian *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, transl. B. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda 1993) 308ff., and see the discussion in West, *East Face* 124–128.

vants, even his wife and child. Just as Zazalla describes the chores of the people of Ikinkalis, Agamemnon describes the tasks that Chryseis fulfills for him. Just as Agamemnon speaks harshly to the priest (1.32) and Achilles (1.139), Zazalla speaks rudely and sarcastically to Meki and with him to the chief captive, Purra.

Perhaps it is only natural that a dispute between two powerful antagonists would play itself out with such verbiage, but the premise of the Iliadic dispute is similar in many details to the situation in the *Song of Release*, as far as we can make out from the latter's frustratingly fragmentary remains.¹⁷ However, the reasons for the detention and release of the person in question are culture-specific. In the case of the Greeks the reason is clear. Chryseis is a war-captive selected as a prize by Agamemnon. Obtaining women by capture, whether for marriage or to be a concubine, was part of Greek culture. When Herodotus (1.1–5) discusses the beginning of Greek-barbarian relations, for example, he sees it as a series of retaliatory conflicts over stolen brides including Helen. The ultimate cause for the Trojan War is always in the background of the conflict that opens the *Iliad*, which simply replays on a smaller scale the reason for the larger conflict.

Hittites sometimes did obtain brides by capture also, as evinced by *Laws* §37.¹⁸ However, there is no hint of that in what we have of the *Song of Release*. The people of Ikinkalis are certainly not stolen brides. Although the suggestion of other scholars that the captives from Ikinkalis were debt slaves has now been debunked by Otto, the song does seem to be adapt-

¹⁷ Compare the threatening words of Anu in the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Kumarbi* (§6, transl. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths* 43), also *Gilgamesh* (Standard Babylonian Version V 100–101, transl. George, *Epic* 41), the Sumerian *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (226–227, transl. T. Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once...: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* [New Haven 1987] 295), and the Ugaritic story of Baal (*Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit* 1.2 i 24–26, transl. N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and his Colleagues* [Sheffield 1998] 60). Arguments and verbal conflicts in Homer are studied by Dickson, *Nestor* 111–117.

¹⁸ See discussion in H. A. Hoffner, Jr., *The Laws of the Hittite: A Critical Edition* (Leiden 1997) 187.

ing a Near Eastern motif of a divine demand for the release of debt slaves.¹⁹ The most likely possibility is that the servants were taken captive in a previous altercation between the men of Ikinkalis and Ebla, or that Ikinkalis as a whole was subordinate to Ebla.

In the *Song of Release*, it is unclear how the freeing of the people of Ikinkalis is connected to assuaging the physical needs of Teššub through sacrifices, or indeed whether Teššub is in fact suffering and in need of offerings, or the description of the miserable state of the god is merely hypothetical. However, Zazalla says that the primary reason he will not release the captives is that he would then have to do himself the menial labor in which they have been employed, i.e., work to fulfill his own physical needs for food and clothing, and Teššub himself demands the release of the servants. Further, other Hittite documents show that sometimes people, whether war captives or free Hittites, were released from compulsory labor in order to devote them to serving a god.²⁰ Finally, in the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Hedammu*, part of the Kumarbi cycle, the god Ea is concerned that if the gods allow the destruction of human worshippers, they will be forced to do menial labor (§6).²¹ It is possible to see Meki's attempts to purify his city from sin and cast it away as an attempt at compensation paid to the god, just as Zazalla's hypothetical offers of payment to Teššub could be seen as compensation. However, it does not seem to be an all-pervasive theme in the *Song of Release*.

In the *Iliad*, however, compensation is a recurrent theme, relating in the end to the idea of glory in the form of epic as compensation for the early death of the Homeric warrior im-

¹⁹ Neu, *Epos* 9, and Hoffner, *Hittite Myths* 180–183, argue that the people of Ikinkalis are debt slaves, an interpretation corrected by Otto, *Akten* 524–531. Bachvarova, *JAOs* (forthcoming), argues that the plot is an adaptation of a Near Eastern tradition.

²⁰ *Annals of Hattusili I*, KBo 10.2 iii 15–20, ed. and transl. F. Imparati and C. Saporetti, “L'autobiografia di Hattušili I,” *Studi classici e orientali* 14 (1965) 40–85, at 52–53; decree of queen Asmunikal, transl. H. Otten, *Helhitische Totenrituale* (Berlin 1958) 106; *Apology of Hattusili III* §13, transl. T. van den Hout in Hallo/Younger, *Context* 204.

²¹ Transl. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths* 52.

mortalized in it.²² The court scene on Achilles' shield (18.497–508) shows two speakers debating the possibility of a murderer atoning for his crime with a monetary payment rather than his life, thus showcasing debates over compensation as one of the essential public performances for Greeks. The action of the Greek epic is set into motion by two demands for compensation for lost captives, Chryseis and Briseis, and this debate among the Greeks is matched with a debate among the Trojans over returning Helen in 7.345–378, and the earlier meeting that had occurred outside of the action of the *Iliad*, mentioned at 3.204–224 and 11.122–142, in which members of the council of elders, because they had been bribed by Paris, refused to return Helen to Menelaus and Odysseus.²³ When the Achaeans reach the conclusion that Apollo is indeed angered over the mistreatment of his priest, compensation is in fact paid, but to Chryses not Apollo, although the Achaeans do make sure to propitiate Apollo as well when Chryseis is returned (1.446–474).

Thus, although the *Iliad* is reusing a traditional narrative sequence of a dispute in assembly over freeing people from forced labor, it is reworking the components to address the paramount concern of the Homeric warrior, his honor, and to echo the larger narrative sequence of the capture (or escape) and return of Helen. In the *Iliad* the return of Chryseis is demanded by her father, motivated by filial affection. Thus, the Near Eastern theme of freeing temple personnel or debt slaves in order to serve the god in question is realized rather differently in Greek, as freeing the daughter of the priest of a god who intervenes on his behalf. Yet the idea of the reciprocal relationship between man and god found in the Near Eastern material is continued, with the priest Chryses pointing out to

²² See G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*² (Baltimore 1999) 28–29, on the idea of glorification in epic as the recompense for dying young. Near Eastern parallels are discussed in West, *East Face* 373. The theme of compensation, which links thematically the stories of Achilles and Helen, has been discussed by D. F. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge 2002).

²³ This is discussed by W. M. Sale, "The Government of the Trojans," *GRBS* 30 (1989) 1–100, at 65–80.

Apollo that he has faithfully fed and housed him; this theme is combined with the Homeric theme of obtaining women by capture. The offence originally committed when Agamemnon refuses to release Chryseis is to the honor of Chryses, who cannot retaliate because he is just a weak old man. Furthermore, Agamemnon slights Apollo by insulting his priest; when Apollo enters the scene he is supporting a loyal servant. Agamemnon sees Achilles' insistence on returning the girl to her father as an assault on his own honor and retaliates by injuring him in turn. The over-arching plot line of the return by force of Helen is motivated not by the thought that she is unjustly imprisoned but by the need to repair the honor of Menelaus.

The *Song of Release* puts in a new light the question of the historicity of the *Iliad*. Scholars have accepted that there could have been one or more conflicts between Greek-speakers and Trojans, but have been more skeptical of the possibility of a war being motivated over the kidnapping of a queen. As Trevor Bryce puts it:²⁴

There are those who firmly maintain, perhaps not without justification, that the war was fought over the abduction of a Mycenaean queen, even if she were a willing abductee. Hittite kings were certainly prepared to go to war to reclaim subjects who had been removed, whether forcibly or voluntarily, from their kingdom. But all speculations about the possible reasons for a Greek-Trojan conflict bring us back to the basic question of whether the tradition of the Trojan War has an authentic historical basis.

The *Song of Release* shows us that the historical kernel of fact behind the Iliadic conflict, if there was one, was immortalized in a traditional story line concerning a conflict over captives that could explain the destruction of a city.

In the *Song of Release*, the consequences of Zazalla's arrogance provide us with the message, "Do not go against the word of the king." While there is some indication that the Hittite king

²⁴ *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford 1998) 398.

did discipline his assembly in regard to their conduct towards inferiors,²⁵ we are not yet sufficiently informed with respect to the real-life context that gave meaning to the conflict in the Hurro-Hittite epic to fully understand how its original audience would have perceived it. But we can at least see that the story supports the king of Ebla against Meki and the Eblaite assembly.

In the *Iliad* Agamemnon is pitted against Achilles, each representing two opposing types of leader. Both are kings by birth, but Achilles is the better warrior while Agamemnon leads the largest contingent. The *Iliad* is ambivalent with regard to the legitimacy of Agamemnon's rule. On the one hand, Thersites presents valid arguments against Agamemnon, yet he is beaten and silenced by Odysseus to the approval of the rest of the assembly. Meanwhile, Agamemnon is portrayed so negatively that Dean Hammer has suggested that the *Iliad* is "a reflection on the nature of political authority," caused by:²⁶

a fundamental shift in the type of political questions asked, from the "power of authority" to carry out decisions suggestive of Dark Age politics to the legitimacy of authority in making these decisions, a question critical to the formation of an increasingly interdependent polis form of political organization.

Despite the fact that Thersites is silenced, he seems to represent a legitimate voice of dissent against the aristocracy, one expressed by a variety of archaic Greek poets.²⁷

There are two good parallels in the wider Near Eastern literature to the assembly scene in the *Song of Release*, one in 1 Kings 12:1–20 and one in the Sumerian epic *Bilgames and Akka*. Yet in neither of these examples is the king rebuffed and overruled as Meki was by his assembly; rather the king is free to make his own decision. These examples make clear how

²⁵ See KBo 22.1 16–20, transl. G. Beckman, "The Hittite Assembly," *JAOs* 102 (1982) 435–442, at 440–441.

²⁶ D. Hammer, "Who Shall Readily Obey?: Authority and Politics in the *Iliad*," *Phoenix* 51 (1997) 1–23, at 2.

²⁷ See W. Donlan, "The Tradition of Anti-Aristocratic Thought in Early Greek Poetry," *Historia* 22 (1973) 145–154.

striking this plot twist in the *Song of Release* must have been to the Hittite audience. Gilgamesh argues directly with his assembly of elders over the imposition of corvée labor on his people by king Akka of Kish. He succeeds in winning over the young men of Uruk in a second assembly, who then go to fight against Akka (1–47).²⁸ At 1 Kings 12:1–20 after King Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam is about to become king, and Jeroboam, who had been promised that he would some day be the leader of most of the tribes of Israel, returns from Egypt and asks Rehoboam in concert with the people of Israel who have gathered in assembly if Rehoboam will be more merciful towards them than his father was. While the older men encourage Rehoboam to be kind, the younger men advise that he reply harshly. Rehoboam follows the bad advice of the younger men, since God wished it so in order to fulfill his promise to punish Solomon for no longer worshipping him properly, and to honor Jeroboam; as a result, Israel rebels against Rehoboam. In the biblical example we have two sides of a discussion presented in an assembly over whether to be merciful to an oppressed and overworked people. The “wrong” argument is couched in angry and sarcastic language similar to that of Agamemnon and Zazalla. The wrong decision is made, to continue to oppress them, and that leads to the downfall of the leader who made the decision. However, unlike Meki, Rehoboam does not argue for a particular side, and is in control of the final decision.

A further Near Eastern text that shows the close parallels to the *Song of Release* is the Akkadian *Atrahasis*, although it describes an assembly of gods, not humans. *Atrahasis* tells the story of the

²⁸ See transl. in George, *Epic* 145–147. Further discussion of the role of the assembly in this poem may be found in D. Katz, “Gilgamesh and Akka: Was Uruk Ruled by Two Assemblies?” *RAsy* 81 (1987) 105–114, and R. T. Riley, “The Saga of an Epic: Gilgamesh and the Constitution of Uruk,” *Orientalia* 69 (2000) 341–367. D. E. Fleming, *Democracy’s Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Government* (Cambridge 2004), is the most recent discussion of real-life assemblies in the Near East; see esp. 204–206, where he discusses the literary passages covered in this section. Also compare 2 Samuel 16:15–17:14, the dispute of Hushai and Ahithophelum before “all the men of Israel”; I owe this reference to Prof. H. A. Hoffner, Jr.

invention of mankind to do manual labor for the gods and the gods' attempt to destroy them, when they become too numerous, with a flood which destroys all of mankind except for the clever Atrahasis and those he brought on board; they are saved because he is careful to follow the advice of the god Enki. The flood story is similar to the Old Testament Noah story or the Greek story of Deucalion.²⁹ The Akkadian narrative is a product of a long-standing tradition, since it contains within it the plot line found in the Sumerian *Eridu Genesis* story and the Babylonian *Epic of Creation*. *Atrahasis* has been found in a variety of locations, in several different versions ranging from Old Babylonian to Neo-Assyrian, and parts of a version of it were incorporated into *Gilgamesh*, told by Utnapishtim to the hero.³⁰ Fragments have been found at Hattusa (there in Middle Babylonian and Hittite), so Hittite scribes and educated poets were surely aware of it.

The Ebla plot line in the *Song of Release* utilizes many of the narrative sequences found in *Atrahasis*: one set of beings oppressing another with coerced labor, decisions reached in assembly, and interaction between a man and his god. However, in the Akkadian epic, the oppressors are gods, who decide to free another set of gods only because they can create a new set of human slaves to replace them. I have suggested that in the *Song of Release*, a conquering city exploits a conquered one. Although in both *Atrahasis* and the *Song of Release* a human has an especially close connection to a god, the relationship between god and human is portrayed differently in each poem. In *Atrahasis*, the eponymous hero is wholly supported by Enki; in the *Song of Release*, Meki does seem to have a special relationship with Teššub, since he presents before him the results of the decision taken by the Eblaite assembly (and probably originally reported to the assembly the god's demands, see KBo 32.19), but he is unable to protect his city against the wrath of Teššub.

Atrahasis opens with an untenable situation: the Anunna-gods are forcing the Igigi-gods to do corvée labor, digging irrigation ditches. The Igigi-gods attack Enlil's house (Old Babylonian A

²⁹ See West, *East Face* 489–493.

³⁰ See Foster, *Before the Muses* 160.

I 39 ff.), and this triggers a debate among the Anunna-gods, who gather in assembly, in which Enlil wonders why the Igigi-gods are angry (I 99–123).³¹ In *Atrahasis* therefore the attack triggers the debate, while in the *Song of Release* the result of the debate seems to trigger the attack. Unlike the assembly of Ebla, the assembly of the gods decides to take effective action to resolve the situation, deciding that the Anunna-gods must kill one of their own as a scapegoat and thus create man to relieve the Igigi-gods of their labor.

I have analyzed how the *Song of Release* reworks particular motifs selected from the Mesopotamian narrative tradition, also found in the West Semitic literature. In the *Song of Release* the theme of meeting the physical needs of a superior being, which appears earliest in the Akkadian materials as the impetus for the invention of humans, is continued in the idea of a reciprocal relationship between gods and humans: humans can relieve the suffering of the gods by feeding and housing them. Further, it contains a message to the Hittite nobility to obey their king. However, the assembly scene of the *Song of Release* is more similar to the *Iliad* than it is to *Atrahasis* or any of the other Near Eastern examples. In both cases humans debate the release of captives in acrimonious terms and the unwise but powerful speaker prevails, while the other speaker is unable to carry his side even though he has a better understanding of what the god demands and the danger of opposing him. A god is angered over the captive who is not freed, and the humans debate in assembly whether the god is in fact angered because of their neglect. The humans in possession of the captives argue that they cannot do without their services, and demand that their opponents do without their own helpers instead. The *Song of Release* also provides an earlier literary parallel to the overarching Iliadic narrative of the capture and return of Helen, although the rape of Helen is imbedded in a Greek set of concerns, of hospitality violated, gaining wives by capture, and the warrior's honor.

What are the implications of the *Song of Release* for those scholars who are attempting to piece together the prehistory of

³¹ Transl. Foster, *Before the Muses* 161–166.

the Homeric tradition? On the one hand it illustrates how a single epic tale was transmitted across the barriers of time, space, culture, and language, from the North Syrian Hurrian sphere to the Hittite sphere.³² This presents us with a concrete example from which we can choose to extrapolate how a necessarily bilingual poet could have translated and adapted a Near Eastern epic tale, blending it with his native Greek tradition. We can see that “Homer” and the “singer” who was responsible for the composition of the *Song of Release* utilized the same process to alter and adapt old themes and motifs to a new purpose. On the other hand it provides a context against which we can appreciate what is original to the Greeks and what is inherited from the Near East in the Homeric tradition. Thirdly, the evidence of the *Song of Release*, when combined with the evidence from other Hurro-Hittite songs, allows us to argue that the SIR₃ tradition was a key influence on the Homeric tradition within Anatolia.

The *Song of Release* is the product of a Hurrian who belonged to the class of scribes and performers who also brought to the Hittite court in Anatolia the administrative and priestly techniques of North Syria. Other scribes and performers of this sort brought the Hurrian and Hittite versions of *Gilgamesh*; the *Kumarbi Cycle* (including *Song of Silver*, *Ullikummi*, and *Hedammu*), found only in Hittite; and the *Song of Kešši*, found at Hattusa in Hurrian and Hittite (with a further Hittite version found at Ugarit). In fact, the *Song of Release* was found in the same building as some fragments of *Gilgamesh* in Middle Babylonian.³³ It has long been known that *Gilgamesh* and *Kumarbi* must be early examples of the tradition that lay behind the portrait of Achilles in the *Iliad* and Hesiod’s *Theogony* respectively. The Akkadian *Gilgamesh* borrows and reworks themes and motifs found in the earlier Sumerian literature. Thus, it inverts the oppression by corvée labor theme found in *Bilgames and Akka*; it

³² I discuss the evidence for adaptation of the story line to Hittite interests in *JAOs* (forthcoming).

³³ See G. Wilhelm, “Neue akkadische Gilgameš-Fragmente aus Hattuša,” *ZA* 78 (1988) 99–121, at 100–101.

includes the flood story from a version of *Atrahasis*;³⁴ and it uses the creation of man sequence to introduce Enkidu.³⁵ In the same way, the Hurro-Hittite *Kumarbi* reuses elements of the succession of gods theme, but also adds new elements, ones found in Hesiod's *Theogony* and in Phoenician works which the Greeks may have known. We do not have enough of the Hittite version of *Gilgamesh* to see to what degree it was altered, although what we do have shows that it was tailored especially for an audience who resided to the west of Mesopotamia; some parts are abbreviated, while Gilgamesh's trip to the Cedar Mountains was developed at further length. (These mountains, after the Old Babylonian period, were thought to lie in the direction of Anatolia rather than to the east.)³⁶ The *Song of Release* reuses many elements of *Atrahasis* but moves most of them to the human sphere, just as the *Iliad* combines and adapts elements found in the Near Eastern tradition to speak to the concerns of an emergent *polis* structure, in which the personal glory of warriors was still of paramount importance, and reciprocal relations between men were still conceived of in terms of exchange of women, gifts, and compensation.

It is remarkable that three separate SIR₃'s found at Hattusa, the *Song of Release*, *Gilgamesh*, and *Kumarbi*, should have such close ties to hexametric poetry in the Ionic dialect. This, along with other evidence, argues for Anatolia as an important location in which Greek-speakers were made aware of Near Eastern epic and incorporated elements of it into their native Indo-European narrative poetry glorifying gods and men. Anatolia is the site of the action of the *Iliad* and the area in which the Ionicized Homeric dialect was developed. A New Hittite treaty (approx. 1200 B.C.) names as the ruler of "Wilusa," which many have equated with "(W)ilios," a man named "Alaksandu," among whose gods appears a certain "Appalinas," although there is a frustrating break at the beginning of

³⁴ See J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia 1982) 214–240.

³⁵ Tigay, *Evolution* 192–197.

³⁶ Tigay, *Evolution* 111–118.

his name which still leaves slight uncertainty.³⁷ If we take this Anatolian god to be Apollo, the *Iliad* is accurate when it names him as the patron god of Ilios.³⁸ Furthermore, Anatolia is the only location in which actual transfer across languages of a motif we consider to be Homeric is found, as attested by a single line of a Luwian song about “steep Wilusa” found in a Hittite festival text. Just as Hurrian-speakers brought the SIR₃ genre to Hattusa, priests and cult performers certainly carried back and forth songs from Hattusa to Troy, where Greek-speakers mingled with native Anatolians.³⁹ We also know that

³⁷ The treaty is translated by G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*² (Atlanta 1999) 87–93. Note that the handcopy of the Alaksandu treaty is incorrect, and therefore the editions and translations of the text are incorrect. My examination of a photograph of the tablet, kindly provided by H. A. Hoffner, Jr., shows that the remains of the broken sign before *ap-pa-li-u-na-aš* (*Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* [KUB] 21.1 iv 27) are consistent with the “god” determinative. The topic of contact between Greek-speakers and Anatolians in the second millennium has been fraught with controversy ever since E. Forrer first suggested it, and F. Sommer denied it: see O. Szemerényi, “Hounded out of Academe...: The Sad Fate of a Genius,” in F. Imparati (ed.), *Studi di storia e di filologia anatolica dedicati a Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli* (Florence 1988) 257–295. Among the points of contention has been whether Wilusa should be located in the Troad, a question difficult to resolve given the paucity of knowledge concerning the political geography of western Anatolia. The plausible deciphering of a Hieroglyphic Luwian monument marking the southern edge of Mira has greatly improved our knowledge and supports placing Wilusa in the vicinity of Troy: J. D. Hawkins, “Tarkasnawa King of Mira: Tarkondemos, Boğazköy Sealings and Karabel,” *AnatSt* 48 (1998) 1–32.

³⁸ R. S. P. Beekes, “The Origin of Apollo,” *JANER* 3 (2003) 1–21, has recently presented a strong argument against W. Burkert’s claim (“Apellai und Apollon,” *RhM* 118 [1975] 1–21) that Apollo’s name has a Greek etymology. Also see Schuol, *Grenzüberschreitungen* 350, on the early attestations of Apollo in Cyprian and Mycenaean.

³⁹ C. Watkins, “The Language of the Trojans,” *Selected Writings* (Innsbruck 1998) 700–717, in 1986 was the first to note the significance of the single line of Luwian song mentioning Wilusa. The multilingual context of Mycenaean Age Troy has already been well-discussed by Watkins, “Language of the Trojans,” and “Homer and Hittite Revisited,” in P. Knox and C. Foss (eds.), *Style and Tradition: Studies in Honor of Wendell Clausen* (Stuttgart 1998) 201–211, and F. Starke, “Troia im Kontext des historisch-politischen

gods were transported from Lazpa (Lesbos) and Ahhiyawa (Achaia) to the Hittite capital. This would have provided opportunities for the transmission of songs honoring gods to cross linguistic barriers.⁴⁰ We have then at least two periods in which transfer could have taken place, one in the second millennium and one in the first, when the Homeric dialect reached its final form. Besides these attested points of contact, there were opportunities for many more in this part of the eastern Mediterranean, at Miletus, Cyprus, Sardis, and Ugarit, for example, where Greek-speakers in the Mycenaean period would have had an opportunity to hear and be inspired by the Hurro-Hittite SIR₃ tradition.

und sprachlichen Umfeldes Kleinasiens im 2. Jahrtausend,” *Studia Troica* 7 (1997) 447–487. It should be noted however that there is no strong evidence that Luwian was the Anatolian language spoken at Troy: H. C. Melchert, “Prehistory,” in H. C. Melchert (ed.), *The Luwians* (Leiden 2003) 8–26, at 11–12 (with earlier references), and M. Hutter, “Aspects of Luwian Religion,” in *Luwians* 211–280, at 265–266. (Hutter remains skeptical of the significance of the so-called Ahhiyawa material, see 264–269.) J. Puhvel has discussed the linguistic evidence for such contact between Anatolian and Greek-speaking poets in several articles: “Homeric Questions and Hittite Answers,” *AJP* 104 (1983) 217–227, “An Anatolian Turn of Phrase in the *Iliad*,” *AJP* 109 (1988) 591–593, *Homer and Hittite* (Innsbruck 1991), “A Hittite Calque in the *Iliad*,” *Historische Sprachforschung* 106 (1993) 36–38. Schuol, *Grenzüberschreitungen* 345–353, again reviews the evidence of the contact between Mycenaean Greek-speakers and Anatolians, arguing that evidence from the *Song of Release* has implications for the transition from oral to written of Homeric epic. P. Högemann, “Zum *Iliad*-Dichter—Ein anatolischer Standpunkt,” *Studia Troica* 10 (2000) 183–198, argues that Homer composed for an Anatolian audience in the first millennium. See on the other hand T. R. Bryce, “Anatolian Scribes in Mycenaean Greece,” *Historia* 48 (1999) 257–264, speculating that Anatolian scribes brought the SIR₃ tradition to Crete and the Mycenaeans.

⁴⁰ On the transfer of gods see S. P. Morris, “Potnia Aswiya: Anatolian Contribution to Greek Religion,” in R. Laffineur and R. Hägg (eds.), *Potnia: Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Liège 2001) 423–434. As she notes (following Watkins, *Writings* 700–717), a Hittite oracle text (KUB 5.6 ii 57', 60') asks how king Mursili II should welcome the gods of Lazpa and Ahhiyawa. She suggests further that the mention of a Potniya Asiwiya in a Mycenaean text from Pylos (Pylos Fr 1206) indicates that a goddess from Assuwa, in Western Anatolia, made the journey from Anatolia to the Greek mainland.

Although Greek epic could have had the opportunity to draw on Anatolian versions of Mediterranean epic, there is no reason to assume that Homer or one of his ancestors directly imitated the *Song of Release*, any more than we should assume that they directly imitated a version of *Gilgamesh* preserved for us. All these songs are drawing on a wider tradition of which only a few examples are preserved, whether from the Mycenaean period or from the Archaic period. However, it is safe to surmise that Homeric poets, at some point in history, were in contact with an offshoot of the Near Eastern epic tradition which was particularly close to the SIR₃ tradition preserved for us at Hattusa.⁴¹

February, 2005

Dept. of Classical Studies
Willamette University
900 State St.
Salem, OR 97301
mbachvar@willamette.edu

⁴¹ This paper is an updated and streamlined version of a section of my dissertation *From Hittite to Homer*. The material has been presented at meetings of the American Oriental Society (2000), the American Philological Association (2001), and the Classical Association (2001). I must thank H. A. Hoffner, Jr., and C. Watkins for all their help, although my views should not be imputed to them.