

The god Eltara and the Theogony

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Firenze

KBo 22.87 is a fragment with a text containing a mythological tale that various scholars (Archi¹, Haas², and more recently, Schwemer³) have interpreted as belonging to the Kumarbi Cycle; however, it has never been studied in depth.

The text, albeit fragmentary, actually offers some interesting data for reflecting on the so called myth of “Theogony or the Kingships of Heaven” and on the entire Kumarbi cycle:

KBo 22.87, Vo.

1'		<i>m</i>]e-mi-iš-ki-u-an da-iš [
2']x-u-i pí-di nu-wa-mu za-ḥ-h[a-in pa-it
3'		ku-i]š-ki ku-it-ki me-ma-i nu ^d [
4'		-]an ma-aḥ-ḥa-an me-mi-eš- [
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5']x ḪUR.ŠAG ^{meš} ḥu-u-ma-an-da-aš me-mi-iš[-
6']še-ir ḥal-lu-u-e-eš-kán-zi an-za-a-aš-ma [
7']ni-ni-in-ki-eš-kán- [-zi
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8'		MU.]KAM ^{hi.a} -aš ^d El-tar-ra-aš ne-pí-ši LUGAL [
9'		-]ki-it nu DINGIR ^{meš} ḥu-u-ma-an-te-eš ^d El[-
10'		-]eš-ki-it nu-kán GE ₆ -za tag-na-az ša-ra-a [da-an-zi
11']x-ú-ma-aš-ši pár-ku nu-kán ^d El-tar-ra-aš x[
12']x ki-nu-un-na ^d U-an i-wa-ar ^d El-[ta-ar-ra-aš i-ya-an-zi ⁴
13']in ša-ra-a ú-wa-da-an-zi x-[
14'		n]e-pí-iš da-a-i an-za-a-aš-ša-za [
15'		[x ^d U ÌR ^{meš} ḥa-tu-kiš-zi-ma[
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16']iš-ta-ma-aš-šir na-at-kán[
17']	pa-a- [
18']	x-x-x [

The content of the fragment may be summarily described thus: in Vo 1'- 4' the discourse refers to someone speaking in the first singular person (-*mu*) and tells that

¹ “The Names of Primeval Gods”, *Or* 59 (1990), p. 127.

² *Geschichte der Hethitischen Religion*. Leiden, New York, Köln 1994, p. 173.

³ *Die Wettergottgestalten Mesopotamiens und Nordsyriens im Zeitalter der Keilschriftkulturen*. Wiesbaden 2001, p. 233 n.1608.

⁴ This restoration is suggested for analogy with KUB 33.112+ III 15-16, a text belonging to the myth of Kingship of LAMMA.

happened in a place which we unfortunately cannot define because of a lacuna (though perhaps it is a high place if the integration of [*park*]*ui* is correct).

At the beginning of l. 3' we could restore *UL* (not) to mean that no one says anything, in others words, no one replies to this account of the battle.

Due to the lacuna at the beginning of line 5' we do not know with any certainty if the passage is interpreted as he speaks to all the mountains (restoring *A-NA* at the beginning and *memišta* at the end of the line 5') or that all the mountains speak (l. 4' *memiš[kanzi]*; in either case it refers clearly to battle and destruction or rebellion (l. 7' *nininkeškanzi*).

The most important part is seen at lines 8'-16' where two different periods may be noted: the time during the years (l. 8' MU.KAM^{hi.a}) when the god Eltara was king of the heaven and all the gods were under Eltara's kingship, when the divinities were probably taken back to the heaven from the dark earth, having previously been banished, as we know from Theogony; and the present time (l. 12' *kinuna*), in which the Stormgod became king as Eltara. In fact, since l. 12' ^dU-*an* is in accusative, it is likely to mean that they made king the Stormgod as Eltara.

Following a lacuna, something or someone is taken back up (l. 13' *šara uwadanzi*), the heaven is occupied (l. 14' *n]epiš dai*) and the Stormgod is the object of reverential fear by the servants (l. 15' *İR^{meš}*), a term, I believe, as meaning their submission to the god.

The verb *ištamaššir* (l. 16') is especially interesting not only because it concludes the story that began on l. 1' (*memiškiuan daiš*), but might be compared with the form *ištamakandu* "listen", used to address the ancient gods in the prologue of the so called Theogony of Kumarbi⁵.

The importance of this fragment is constituted, in my view, by the mention of the kingship of the god Eltara among the gods in the sky for a certain number of years, one that is added to the well-known kingships of Alalu and Anu. This raises some relevant issues and calls for the so called Kumarbi cycle to be reconsidered.

It is known that Eltara belongs to the category of the ancient gods (*karuileš šiuneš*), present in Hittite documentation since Middle Kingdom and already studied by Laroche⁶ and Archi⁷ especially.

We know too that these divinities, whose number varies from 5 to 15, are present in both the rituals and in the list of witnesses in treaties, where they always appear in a group of twelve (with the exception of the treaty between Muwatalli and Alakšandu, where they are nine), just as they are twelve in the sanctuary of Yazılıkaya. The presence of ancient divinities in Hurrian rituals or section in Hurrian has led to the obvious conclusion that they belong to the Hurrian cult⁸.

Archi has rightly noted that in the ritual texts the Mesopotamian divinities Enlil and Ninlil do not appear, neither does the group made up of Anu, Antu and Apantu; instead, always present in both rituals and treaties are the first four that appear in the prologue of the

⁵ KUB 33.120+ I 4'.

⁶ "Les dénominations des dieux "antiques" dans les textes hittites", in *Anatolian Studies Presented to H.G. Güterbock on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*. K. Bittel et al. edd. Istanbul 1974, pp. 175-185.

⁷ *Or* 59 (1990), pp. 114-115.

⁸ *Or* 59 (1990), pp. 116-117.

so called Theogony, namely Nara, Napšara, Minki and Ammunki. He noted also that the list established during the period of Šuppiluliuma I remains unchanged in the Syrian treaties, whereas in the treaties of Anatolian domain, Apantu is replaced by Kumarbi, thereby concluding that it is obvious that the list in the treaties depends directly on the Hurrian myth⁹.

Furthmore, this scholar, in a recent article¹⁰, pointed out that in the treaties drawn up by the king Muršili II with the Anatolian kings the order of citation is Alalu, Kumarbi, Anu, hence a sequence that does not mirror the successions of kingship as narrated in the Theogony and has concluded that “the royal courts of western Anatolia knew Kumarbi but were not necessarily aware of the identity which had developed in Syrian theological circles”. To these observations we may add that the sequence seems rather to mirror the criterion of the filiation of Kumarbi from Alalu (^dKumarbiš ^dAlaluwaš NUMUN-ŠU)¹¹ and that the god Eltara never appears in the list of witnesses or in either the Anatolian or Syrian treaties.

As for the name of Eltara, it is the shared opinion of scholars (Haas¹², Archi¹³) that it might be an amplification by means of the suffix *-tara* of the name El, known only in Syrian circles starting from the Ugarit texts where he has the appellative of “father”, who during the first millennium would be the most important god of pantheon in the Western-Semitic world.

If my interpretation is correct, this fragment takes on a considerable importance, considering what is upheld by many scholars and confirmed by Archi who, in his recent article, sustains that “although there is no mention of a Theogony, some scholars have assumed that the form of the pantheon as reflected in the myths is the result of a conflict between El and his principals sons, Ba^cl, Yam, Môt, who would appear to have deposed their father. El does not appear to have a friendly relationship with Ba^cl”¹⁴.

It can be said that the fragment in question, where the god Eltara and the Stormgod alternate, is clearly an important testimony even in the study of certain Ugaritic mythology themes, like the problem of identifying El with Kronos or even useful to clarify the origin of fundamental episodes such the struggle among the gods reported by Filo of Biblo in his *Phoenician History*¹⁵.

The god Eltara does not play an important role in the Hittite cult and the mention of only Alalu, Anu, Kumarbi in the list of treaties may strengthen the hypothesis of a “minor kingship”, but this is not surprising because the myth-cult relationship is almost never

⁹ *Or* 59 (1990), p. 116.

¹⁰ “Translation of Gods: Kumarbi, Enlil, Dagan/NISABA, Halki”, *Or* 73 (2004), p. 322.

¹¹ KUB 33.120 I 19.

¹² *Geschichte*, p. 113 e n. 51.

¹³ “Substrate: Some remarks on the formation of the west Hurrian pantheon”, in *Sedat Alp’a armağan. Festschrift für S. Alp. Hittite and Other Anatolian and Near Eastern Studies in Honour of S. Alp.* H. Otten, E. Akurgal, H. Ertem and A. Süel edd. Ankara 1992, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Or* 73 (2004), p. 328.

¹⁵ On El in general and on these problemes see A. Caquot - M. Sznycer - A. Herdner, *Textes ougartiques, I. Mythes et Légendes*. Paris 1974, pp. 55-68.

objective. Nevertheless, the ritual KUB 45.28+¹⁶ is very interesting for, after the description of the opening of a hole, the ancient gods are placed and called by name. They are divided into two groups: the first group is made up of Eltara and Nabira with the Stormgod and small statues of the divine mountains; the second group is formed by Minki, Tuḫuši, Ammunki, Awannamu and beneath them is placed Kumarbi. After a lacuna, there is mention of the throne and the statue of Ea. Therefore, some of ancient gods we find in the Theogony and in our text are present¹⁷.

If we have to consider the fragment as part of the so called Kumarbi cycle, then the problem remains on its insertion among the compositions that are traditionally part of it. After the studies of Hoffner¹⁸, Siegelová¹⁹, Houwink ten Cate²⁰, Pecchioli Daddi²¹ that have been added to those of Güterbock²², Otten²³, Laroche²⁴, the most likely sequence currently held is, first the Theogony, then the text on the Kingship of the god LAMMA, hence the Song of Silver, Hedammu and the Song of Ullikummi.

However, the fragment KBo 22.78, with the testimony of the latter celestial kingship, adds elements for further reflection on the cycle for these texts, an all-embracing label which allows scholars to attribute many fragments to this series (and indeed recent studies tend to amplify it increasingly) by allowing texts often with a difficult interpretation to enter, texts that undoubtedly have some connection with personages or situations present in the works that form part of the cycle as defined above, but which perhaps end up losing sight the specificities that exist in these five narrations.

There is no doubt that the god Kumarbi appears in all five narrations, but since the development of different themes and mythological motives shows different characteristics, then the basic idea of all the works on these myths (i.e. that there should be a thematic unity so large, though consisting of various themes and motives, as upheld by Houwink ten Cate²⁵ in order to be able to trace the continuous and sequential development of the five compositions) should be reconsidered.

¹⁶ See H. Otten - C. Rüster, "Textanschlüsse und Duplicate von Boğazköy -Tafeln", *ZA* 68 (1978), pp. 154-155.

¹⁷ See Haas, *Geschichte*, p. 905.

¹⁸ See, recently, *Hittite Myths*. Atlanta 1990, with previous bibliography.

¹⁹ *Appu-Märchen und Hedammu-Mythus*. (StBoT 14). Wiesbaden 1971.

²⁰ "The Hittite Storm God: his Role and his Rule According to the Hittite Sources", in *Natural Phenomena. Their Meaning, Depiction and Description in Ancient Near East*. D.J.W Meijer et al., edd. Amsterdam - Oxford - New York - Tokyo 1992, pp. 83-148.

²¹ F. Pecchioli Daddi- A.M. Polvani, *La mitologia ittita*. Brescia 1990, pp. 115-131.

²² *Kumarbi: Mythen vom churritischen Kronos*. Zurich 1946; "The Hittite Version of the Hurrian Kumarbi Myths: Oriental Forerunners to Hesiod", *AJA* 52 (1948), pp. 123-134; "The Song of Ullikummi, Revisited Text of the Hittite Version of a Hurrian Myth", *JCS* 5 (1951), pp. 136-161; *JCS* 6 (1952), pp. 8-42; "Hittite Mythology", in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*. S.N. Kramer ed. New York 1961, pp. 139-179; "Hethitische Literatur", in *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft. Altorientalische Literatur*. W. Röllig ed. Wiesbaden 1978, pp. 211-253; "Kumarbi", in *RIA* 6 (1980-1983), pp. 324-329.

²³ *Mythen vom Gotte Kumarbi: Neue Fragmente*. Berlin 1950.

²⁴ "Textes mythologiques hittites en transcription", *RHA* 82 (1968), pp. 39- 47.

²⁵ *Natural Phenomena*, p. 111.

The Theogony is a text that surely has traces of the cultural influence from Mesopotamia, not only for some divinities mentioned therein, but also for the idea of succession of divine generations²⁶; in fact, at the beginning of the text there is a precise temporal articulation of ancient time (*karu*), the time of the myth we would call it today, in which the event is placed; further we read “formerly, in ancient years” (*karuššan karuilaš MU^{hi.a}*).

As to the background of this indefinite and remote time long ago, there is the succession of kingship of heaven of Alalu and Anu lasting the symbolic, but definite period of nine years, or rather nine counted years (9 MU^{hi.a} *kappuwantaš*). During the reign of Alalu the cupbearer is Anu, defined as the first among the gods²⁷, therefore, for the Hittites Alalu has the characteristics of a first-born deity that they distinguish from Anu who is already the main god of an existing polytheistic pantheon.

The extreme fragmentary nature of the text prevent us from knowing the exact development of the myth, however we know that the central part of the second column is constituted by the account of Kumarbi’s pregnancy. The third column instead concerns perhaps the preparations for a battle for the conquest of the celestial kingship (Güterbock gave up the idea of translating it owing to its lacunarity). Three divinities are mentioned there: Anu, NAM.ḪÉ and Ea, the role of whom is not clear, even if Güterbock retains that at the end of the myth is Ea who becomes king, due to the mention of his name at the end of the fourth column before the colophon. It should not be forgotten that difficulty of reading was present even to the Hittite scribe since, from the same colophon we learn that the text from which he was copying was much damaged²⁸. In the fourth column Kumarbi is no longer mentioned, only the Cart.

Even the deeds narrated in the Song of the god LAMMA unfold in an exact time, the period defined by the phrase “for x years LAMMA was king in the heaven”. This kingship takes place *after* Teššub is pulled down from the sky and his reins taken away from him by LAMMA, hence, presumably, after a period in which the Stormgod reigned. LAMMA would be placed on the throne by Kumarbi and Ea, who, discontent with what happens under his reign (a lack of sacrifices offered by the people to the gods), would remove him and send a messenger to the Netherworld to advise Nara-Napšara of his deposition. The remaining part of the text probably contained the story about a re-conquest of the kingship by Teššub. If it is true that there was a kingship of LAMMA after one of the Stormgod Teššub, the Song of LAMMA shows that the so called cycle of Kumarbi presents a narrative nucleus centred not only on the conflict between ancient and first-born divinities, but also on the tale of the successions of kingship, of struggles among the gods (real theomachies) for the supreme power of heaven, that has involved also the first-born deities. The god we imagine to be the final victor, Teššub, would be subject to defeats and victories, and his adversary Kumarbi does not always look for victory for himself (nor always through his sons or emanations), since, as we have seen, he had put on the throne, together with Ea, the protector god LAMMA.

²⁶ See F. Pecchioli Daddi, *Mitologia*, p. 127.

²⁷ KUB 33 120+ I 8 : ^d*A-nu-uš DINGIR^{mes}-aš ḫa-an-te-ez-zi-ya-aš-me-iš pí-ra-an-še-[it]*.

²⁸ KUB 33.120+ IV 33: *ar-ḫa ḫar-ra-an e[-eš-ta]*.

Therefore the Theogony and the Kingship of LAMMA constitute two compositions more closely connected than others of the narrative theme, the *succession* in the time of the divine kingships, a theme of Mesopotamian influence and it is perhaps for this reason that the prologue is addressed not only to the first-born divinities, but also to Enlil and Ninlil.

To this narrative genre belongs, in my opinion, the fragment KBo 22.87, which clearly narrates another phase in this series of divine successions in which the heavenly kingship belongs to the god Eltara, belonging to the ancient gods (*karuileš šiuneš*). Indeed, hypothetically, this fragment might even be part of the text that narrates the final re-conquest of power on the part of Teššub²⁹. The verb *ištamaššir* (l. 16') is interesting not only because it concludes the tale which began on l. 1' (*memiškiuan daiš*), but because it might be compared with the form *ištamakandu* (listen) addressed to the ancient gods in the prologue of the so called Theogony of Kumarbi³⁰.

Instead, the myth of Ullikummi is a different case: an almost complete text (the proem and colophon are conserved) that has a strong composition unity centred upon the *personal* conflict between Kumarbi, the father of all the gods and Teššub. In fact, it is expressly stated in the prologue that the singer shall sing the wicked plans to destroy Teššub by using a stone monster as a substitute. It is exactly this idea of substitute, of an emanation, that had worked to attribute the Song of Silver and the Song of Hedammu to the cycle of Kumarbi, as moments of the struggle between the god and the Stormgod, in one case with the help of his son Silver and, in another, of a monstrous snake³¹.

However, we should note that the Song of Silver is very different in composition and style: the singer identifies his information sources as some wise men³²; in no part of the preserved text, as already noted by Hoffner³³, is there testimony of any kingship, nor is there any subsequent defeat of Silver; it is only a matter of conjecture, albeit plausible. Silver is held to be the son of a woman and of Kumarbi (in truth the name of the god is not preserved, but it is presupposed in the definition "father of the city of Urkiš"³⁴). Indeed, we know that the story unfolds at the time of the kingship of the Stormgod (he is king in the sky³⁵), defined as a brother, (or rather a stepbrother) of Silver, in a phase in which powers seem to be assigned to the gods since Šauška is queen in Ninive. All the story of orphan Silver (who is not really orphan at all because his mother is alive and his father Kumarbi has only abandoned him), in search of his father, with the unclear episode about the assault on the Moon and the Sun being pulled down from the sky, seems more like a fable than an episode of the Theogony. The difficulty of placing the story of Silver in sequence was also underlined by Hoffner³⁶ who sustained that the lack of prologue, despite the fact that the table is not

²⁹ See Houwink ten Cate, *Natural Phenomena*, p. 112.

³⁰ KUB 33.120+ I 5, 7.

³¹ See F. Pecchioli Daddi, *Mitologia*, p. 126.

³² HFAC 12, I 8: *nu-mu ḥa-ad-da-an-te-eš LÚ^{meš} - uš wa-an[-nu-mi-aš DUMU?-aš . . me-mi-ir]*.

³³ *Hittite Myths*, p. 48.

³⁴ KUB 36.18 II 9': *U]RU-aš URU Úr-ki-ša-ša at-ta-aš-š[i-iš]*.

³⁵ KUB 36.18 II 12'-13'.

³⁶ "The Song of Silver. A Member of Kumarbi Cycle of 'Songs'", in *Documentum Asiae Minoris Antiquae. Festschrift für H. Otten zum 75. Geburtstag*. E. Neu – C. Rüster edd. Wiesbaden 1987, pp. 147: "...the Song of Ullikummi does not begin with such invocation: Why should the Song of Silver?"

broken at the beginning, is due to the fact that the listeners already knew the prologue of the Theogony and hence had no need for it.

Even the Song of Hedammu, where the god Kumarbi is among the protagonists, cannot, in my view, be strictly assimilated to the core of the Theogony. Siegelová³⁷ rightly pointed out the close relationship of this story with the Song of Ullikummi for the presence of some motives in common, such as the alliance between the god Kumarbi and the Sea, the function of the goddess IŠTAR who with her graces must bewitch in both myths through its two monsters, one in stone, the other, the voracious snake, the sexual excitement; however the theme considered central, the creation of a substitute *against* Teššub is only a supposition for an analogy to the myth of Ullikummi, since no fragment turns up an explicit reference to the name Hedammu, as I have already stated³⁸.

If the fragment n. 6 of the Siegelová edition³⁹ must be considered belonging to the myth (but I am not sure), then I would say that the task assigned to Hedammu is to destroy humanity, a central theme in Mesopotamian literature (especially the poem of Atramḫašiš). The text reads: “(8) [Ea], king of wisdom spoke to the gods (9) [...].The god beg[an] to speak: ‘Why do you destroy [the [m]en? (10) Do they not perhaps make sacrifices to the gods or burn cedar wood for them? (11) If you destroy humanity they shall not honour the gods anymore (12) and no one shall offer any more [bre]ad and beverage (13) Hence it shall happen that the Stormgod, the powerful king of Kummya, shall take the plough (14) and it shall happen that IŠTAR and Hepat (15) shall grind the millstone themselves’. (16) [Ea], king of wisdom, began to say to Kumarbi: ‘Why (17) only you Kumarbi, do you try to do thus in a way that humanity is in bad conditions? (18) Does not humani[ty] make (available) the granary and does it not libate to you immediately, Kumarbi? (19) And in the temple do we not libate in happiness to you, Kumarbi (20), father of the gods? Do we not libate the Stormgod, (21) a bastion⁴⁰ of humanity? And the name is not pronounced of me, Ea, the king?’ ”.

This passage clearly reflects the literary Mesopotamian *topos* of the destruction of humanity and the consequent catastrophic consequences for the gods; indeed, in the prediction that also Teššub, IŠTAR and Hepat should work there is a clear re-echoing, almost in ironic key, of the initial part of the poem of Atramḫašiš. Furthermore, it is Ea who, in confirming his speech in defence of the humanity, puts into absolute parity the sacrifices the men made for Kumarbi as those for Teššub, a level of absolute parity between the two divinities.

In conclusion, it seems to me that, at the present time, more than just “one cycle of Kumarbi” wherein every thing is allowed to enter, often at the price of strained

Indeed ‘Kingship in Heaven’ may need it because it was the first part of the larger Kumarbi cycle, of which the Song of Ullikummi was a later part. If the Song of Silver was also a part of this larger cycle, it too could dispense with the invocation, assuming that the audience had heard/read it at the beginning of Kingship in Heaven.

³⁷ *Appu-Märchen*, pp. 82-84.

³⁸ *Mitologia*, p. 135 n. 6.

³⁹ KUB 33.100 + KUB 36.16 III 8-24.

⁴⁰ H.A. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, p. 52 translates: “Canal Inspector of Mankind”.

interpretations, we would be able to acknowledge *more* mythological cycles (or rather narratives nuclei), each with their own specificity of form and content and given a different degree of dependence from either Mesopotamian or Hurrian models. The Theogony, centred upon the account of Kumarbi's pregnancy remains a unique work by conception and for narrative quality; the text of Kingship of LAMMA and the fragment KBo 22.87 for the presence of that key phrase "for x years was king in the sky" perhaps constitute an amplification of the initial theme in the Theogony. Equally, the Song of Ullikummi has its complex organic nature around the theme of the conflict between Kumarbi and Teššub, and has influenced also the interpretation of the Song of Silver and the myth of Hedammu, which instead probably makes up part of other narratives centres⁴¹.

The evaluation the Hittites made of the content of their mythological and literary works differ from our interpretative canons and is exemplified by the text of the Song of Ullikummi where, in the prologue, the scribe announces that he would sing the wicked intentions of Kumarbi to destroy the Stormgod, but in the colophon the definition of the content in the tablet is the Song of Ullikummi and not Kumarbi.

⁴¹ A completely different opinion is held by Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, p. 67 who also retains the same Hurrian-Hittite Bilingual "belongs to the same anthology as the Kumarbi Cycle".