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Practice and Perception of Black Magic among the Hittites¹

Abstract

The present paper argues that passages in the Hittite texts often understood as attestations of the practice of black magic should instead be seen as indications of the perception and fear of it, and that suspicions, accusations and fears should not be taken as evidence. Alternative reasons for the prevalent belief in and fear of black magic in these texts are then examined, and it is suggested that psychological and sociological phenomena well-known from a broad range of ancient and more recent cultural settings could account for them no less convincingly.

Keywords: Black Magic, Sorcery, Magic, Ritual, Witchcraft, Witchhunts, Hittite, *Schadenszauber*

Introduction

This paper intends to offer a perspective on the practice and/or perception of black magic among the Hittites, on the discussion of black magic among Hittitologists and on what can and cannot reasonably be taken as evidence for the practice of black magic. This view differs in several essential ways from that occasionally found in the secondary literature.² It

¹ I have had the opportunity to present a summary of my views on this topic on several occasions (Università degli studi di Firenze, 12.12.2008, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Kolloquium zum Alten Orient, 16.12.2008; Internationaler Workshop 'Neue Entwicklungen in der hethitologischen Forschung' des Instituts für Altorientalistik der FU Berlin, 02.–03.07.2009), and I wish to thank all those persons who commented on my lectures and discussed various issues with me. I would like to thank especially Birgit Christiansen for her highly insightful comments on a draft of this paper and several fruitful discussions; Alice Mouton for sharing her very informative paper 'Sorcellerie hittite' (2010) with me prior to its publication; Daniel Schwemer for affording me access to his paper 'Mesopotamian Magic: Texts, Practice and Underlying Ideas' (in press) before its appearance; and Giulia Torri for her comments on this paper and for sending me the text of a lecture she gave at the Oriental Institute in Chicago in 2006, entitled 'Witchcraft in Hittite Society'.

² This paper does not provide an overview or a catalogue of passages which can be considered as demonstrating black magic, which are very few indeed. Nor does it offer an analysis of rituals designed to defend against black magic or to purify or heal a person afflicted by various maladies including black magic. For valuable recent treatments of the magical arts and defences against the less savoury of them in ancient Anatolia, see J. Klinger (2002), A. Mouton (2010), D. Schwemer (2007a), 255–276;

should, however, be stated clearly and explicitly at this point that it will not be argued in this paper that black magic was never practised in Ḫatti. It most probably was on occasion, and indeed some sources can likely be taken to suggest so. It will be asserted, though, among other things, that the great majority of the textual passages often understood to indicate that black magic was practiced cannot reasonably be taken as evidence for it.³ Many of them indeed yield rich and highly interesting information concerning prevalent fears, conceptions and perceptions connected with black magic and its would-be practitioners in the Hittite world, but little if any useful information about actual practice, with which they should not be confused. Magic will be defined for the purposes of this paper as action and/or speech (usually both) performed with the aim of mobilizing a generally intentioned supernatural being or power into acting or functioning in accordance with the wishes and/or for the benefit of the object of the action/speech.⁴ With the term black magic is intended no more than magic performed with intent — intent being the key word⁵ — to harm the object at which the magic is directed.⁶ White magic is thus magic performed with intent of benefiting the object.⁷

P. Taracha (2009), 149–158 and M.-C. Trémouille (2004); for the most recent and informed overviews of Mesopotamian practices, see T. Abusch (2002), C. Jean (2006) and D. Schwemer (2007a; in press).

³ Indeed, one suspects that rites intended to counter black magic were performed incomparably more frequently than black magic itself. As J. Klinger (2002), 149a has noted: ‘Freilich stehen uns aus den offiziellen Archiven z. B. nur Beschwörungsrituale, die sich gegen Schadenszauber richten, aber keine, die ihn hervorrufen, zur Verfügung.’ Similarly, essentially all references to black magic in the Hittite texts relate to it from the perspective of the victim or, less often, of an unaffected third party (as in the laws), but for all practical purposes never from the perspective of the perpetrator. One highly interesting potential exception (see below, p. 177 f., sub No. 5), a ritual against the enemies of the king (CTH 417) – which, however, would presumably have been seen by its performer as legitimate defensive magic – is discussed by M. Hutter (1991), 39f. For the use of figures, *inter alia* in rituals intended to protect the patient and harm whoever had accursed him/her, see V. Haas (2003), 569–614. For discussion of a further possible case, KBo 31.6 iii? 1’–5’, see J. Miller (2004), 33 and n. 53.

⁴ Similarly, e.g. W. Rummel – R. Voltmer (2008), 21. For recent considerations on Hittite *alwanzatar*, roughly ‘sorcery, black magic’, as well as a useful overview of anthropological and social thought regarding magic as it pertains to the Hittite world, see A. Mouton (2010).

⁵ See e.g. W. Rummel – R. Voltmer (2008), 34, where the distinction between harmful and healing magic during the time of Diocletian vs. the universal condemnation of both during later periods is mentioned. They seem to overlook, however, the wealth of obviously magical rituals performed in and by the church, so that it was in fact only unsanctioned magical practices that were condemned; in other words, the church strove for a monopoly on ‘good’ magic, defined as magic that it practiced, while condemning ‘bad’ magic, which it defined as anything outside the monopoly. Cf. also B. P. Levack (2003), 24.

⁶ The oft-employed German term ‘Schadenszauber’ is useful, as it contains the concept of ‘harmful’, and depending on whether it is taken as ‘schädlichen Zauber’ or as ‘Zaubern um zu schaden’, it may also denote intent. Similarly useful is the French ‘magie malveillante’. One could thus speak of ‘malevolent’ rather than ‘black’ magic. S. M. Maul (1988), 170 understandably advises against using the term ‘black magic’ at all; on the other hand, if we were to strike all loaded terms from our vocabulary we would presumably be left with no terms at all.

⁷ As has often been pointed out (e.g. S. M. Maul (1988), 169; J. Klinger (2002), 148c), the difference between white and black magic is generally not one of the techniques or actions employed, which tend to be similar. Nor are the practitioners strictly divided into adepts of black vs. adepts of white magic, but are often the same persons (e.g. A. Mouton (2010)).

Incidentally, the term ‘magic’ is understood here as one element of a rather inclusively defined ‘religion’ – indeed an element of all, or very nearly all, religions, including all the prominent religions in today’s world. Further, prayer or speech is understood as lying at one end of the spectrum of magic, at the opposite end of which lie ritual actions. Prayer would thus be an element of magic that tends, sometimes strongly, toward increased speech and decreased action.⁸ It is not assumed that magic and religion are two terms to be contrasted or opposed,⁹ magic describing the perverse and degenerate practices of ‘other’ peoples, religion referring to the virtuous and admirable practices of ‘our’ cultures. These considerations are not offered as ‘the’ or ‘the correct’ definition of this phenomenon. It is in fact too complex and varied through time and space for any definition to fully encapsulate it. Rather, the definition attempts to stake out a centre of the subject, but (as do essentially all definitions of broad, complex phenomena) it will break down around the edges, and it will serve as a functional one for this paper.

Of course, the line between black magic and white magic is not always a perfectly clear one, and there is ample grey area between them. White magic will often have only the aim of benefiting a person, as would generally be the case with an attempt to heal a sick person, for example. Even white magic practiced with largely benevolent intent, however, can have a darker side to it. In the Hittite laws it is forbidden under penalty of death (H. A. Hoffner (1997), § 44b),¹⁰ for example, to dispose of the materials used in a benevolent ritual in a place where another person might come into contact with them, as these are thought to potentially still carry harmful, even deadly, contaminants. The border between negligence and harmful intent is thus one grey area.

And whether magical rites are to be seen as white or black magic may sometimes be a matter of perspective, of which there would be at least three, i.e. the performer of the magical rites (and those allied with him/her), the person (or persons or place) at whom the rites are directed, and an unaffected third party.¹¹ The Hittites would clearly have viewed their rituals to purify their own army, for example, as legitimate magic with good intent. This would be what we might call the insider perspective. When, however, the Hittite ritualist Uḫḫamuwa, certainly not entirely innocently, sends a scapegoat loaded with the extracted impurities of the army into enemy territory, those enemies would surely be justified in seeing, from their perspective, the same rites as the practice of black magic designed to harm them.¹² This one could call an outsider perspective.¹³ And even blatantly

⁸ For the interplay of prayer, hymn, oracle and ritual in Hittite context, see e.g. I. Singer (2002), 2–4.

⁹ In contrast, e.g. to A. Goetze (1957), 152f., and in stark, even vehement, contrast to e.g. B.P. Levack (2003), 14f. or A. S. Kapelrud (1959).

¹⁰ In § 170 a free person simply paid a fine, a slave was put to death, for black magic. Despite this death penalty prescription, there are, as far as I am aware, no attestations of a person actually being put to death for sorcery in the Hittite sources; see S. de Martino – E. Devecchi (in press), § 3.

¹¹ See, e.g. M. Hutter (1991), 40.

¹² Cf. similarly in Dandanku’s ritual, KUB 56.59+54.65 iii 32–38, recently edited by D. Bawanypeck (2005), 144f. For a neo-Assyrian ritual that likewise aims simultaneously to empower its own army and to harm the enemy troops, see D. Schwemer (2007b).

¹³ This ‘othering’ in K. Stratton’s words is discussed in her nicely named chapter (2007), 107ff., ‘My Miracle, Your Magic: Heresy, Authority, and Early Christianities’.

black magic designed to injure some party will generally have at least two objects, one of which is to be harmed by the black magic and one of which is to benefit from the harm done to the other.¹⁴ White magic will therefore generally have a single object, black magic generally two.

Another criterion according to which magical rituals could be seen as white or black magic is the question of whether they are offensive or defensive in nature, the former generally being viewed as illegitimate, the latter legitimate, a dichotomy which may be manifested in the rites being practiced in secret vs. in public.¹⁵ Tudḫaliya and Nikkalmati, king and queen in the Middle Hittite period, presumably understood the rites they enacted as purely defensive acts against aggressive attacks of Tudḫaliya's sister, Ziplantawiya, and therefore justified. They may well have crossed the line from purely defensive magic to the practice of black magic, however, when they attempted to deflect the magical attack back against Ziplantawiya herself. They thus intended that she should suffer the fate that they believed she attempted to inflict upon them. If Ziplantawiya was in fact innocent of employing black magic against her brother and his family, and if she had discovered that he had attempted to deflect harmful magic back on to her, she certainly would have understood it as the practice of black magic against her, and not entirely without reason.¹⁶ These are only several of numerous grey areas between black and white magic that could be discussed at length.¹⁷

The Prevailing View

The first and principal prevalent notion in the secondary literature that needs to be reconsidered is that the accusations of a person who feels that s/he has been afflicted by black magic can be understood as evidence that the accused has indeed performed black magic against him/her. Here quotations from several authors will be provided in order to illustrate the assumptions against which this paper will be arguing,¹⁸ as well as to show that this view is in fact common enough among Hittitologists.¹⁹ For example, M. Vieyra (1966),

¹⁴ See e.g. W. Rummel – R. Voltmer (2008), 3.

¹⁵ See, e.g. S. M. Maul (1988), 170; cf. D. Schwemer's (in press) similar division into defensive, aggressive and harmful magic.

¹⁶ It is thus somewhat ironic that Ziplantawiya is generally considered to have been the one to have practiced black magic against her brother and his family, while the only concrete evidence in the available textual material relates to Tudḫaliya and Nikkalmadi practicing it against Ziplantawiya.

¹⁷ Another grey area would be conditional curses, such as those in the Military Oaths (CTH 427), designed to insure loyalty; see e.g. A. Mouton (2010). For curses in the Hittite corpus in general see K. M. Reichardt (1998), A. Hagenbuchner-Dresel (2010) and B. Christiansen (in preparation).

¹⁸ Of course, not all these authors use the term 'black magic', but this is immaterial for present purposes and should not distract from the point at hand, i. e. understanding accusations and perceptions of such as evidence for it.

¹⁹ It may occasionally be the case, of course, that a statement in the secondary literature is simply inexactly expressed rather than an indication that the author in fact believes that such indications in the texts are evidence of black magic. One sees, for example, descriptions in the indicative of the contents of a text containing accusations of black magic instead of the subjunctive. H. Kronasser (1961), 140, e.g. writes: 'Da es trotz des Verbotes der Zauberei viele Verzauberungen gab, die sich be-

104, in the one of the earliest and most explicit cases,²⁰ writes, ‘Un certain nombre de cas de magie noire sont attestés par des textes royaux,’ and he provides the following list:

1. «Testament» de Hattusili I (début de l’ancien empire, circa 1650): allusion aux «vieilles femmes» interrogées, consultées afin de découvrir l’avenir (et sans doute aussi dans des buts moins licites) par l’entourage féminin du roi, et recommandation de mettre fin à ces relations.
2. Mursil II (vers 1345): allusion dans des textes annalistiques à la mort de la reine provoquée par les pratiques magiques de la reine-mère, veuve de Suppiluliuma (Cf. KUB XIV 4).
3. Hattusil III (vers 1280): plusieurs allusions aux pratiques magiques employées contre lui par ses ennemis (Arma-Datta, sa femme et ses fils convaincus légalement de sorcellerie; la ville de Samuha «remplie de magie» par les ennemis du roi).
4. Certains rituels magiques qui concernent la purification de la personne royale font allusion aux malédictions qui auraient pu être prononcées contre le roi, la reine ou le temple.

Similarly, V. Haas (1994), 883,²¹ has written, ‘Schadenszauber auszuüben, war am hethitischen Hof und gewiß auch in der übrigen Gesellschaft weit verbreitet.’ In order to demonstrate this claim, he refers to the following Hittite text passages:²²

- (1) Ḫattušili I. beklagt sich über den Umgang seiner Gemahlin mit den für das Zauberwesen zuständigen ‘alten Frauen’.
- (2) Obwohl im Telipinu-Erlaß Zauberei am königlichen Hof unter schwere Strafe gestellt ist, wird Tutḫaliya I./II. mitsamt seiner Gemahlin Nikkalmadi und dem Thronfolger von seiner Schwester Zip(pa)lantawiya behext.²³
- (3) Muṣšili II. beschuldigt in einem von ihm angestregten Prozeß die Tawananna mittels Zauberei seine Gemahlin getötet zu haben.
- (4) Eine Frau Manna-DUGUD verhext mittels Substitutionspuppen drei Personen, darunter Šarri-Kušuḫ, der mit dem gleichnamigen Sohn Šuppiluliumas I. identisch sein könnte.

sonders als Krankheiten zeigten, ...’, whereby he presumably did not really believe that Verzauberungen manifested themselves as Krankheiten, but that the persons involved believed such. Similarly V. Haas’ (1988) entry on Magic in RIA is formulated primarily in the indicative. Still, inexact wording can be misleading and the reader may not always correctly divine what the writer actually intended, and even if some cases of such assertions in the secondary literature are merely inexact wording, it seems clear enough that the perception that this paper aims to counter is indeed prevalent. Cf. also n. 27.

²⁰ Nowhere in A. Goetze (1957) or H. G. Güterbock (1950), for example, does one find such explicit statements. The question was followed no further in the secondary literature.

²¹ Nearly verbatim also in V. Haas (1988), 239; cf. similarly G. Frantz-Szabó (1995), 2008.

²² The numbering of these examples has been added for clarity.

²³ Cf. e.g. J. Klinger (2002), 149: ‘Etwa ein Jahrhundert später versuchte sich Tutḫaliya I. (ca. 1420–1400 v. Chr.) selbst mit den Mitteln eines Beschwörungsrituals gegen die im Text ausdrücklich genannten Aktionen seiner Schwester Ziplantawi zur Wehr zu setzen, die ihm, seiner Frau und seinen Nachkommen durch magische Praktiken schaden wollte.’

- (5) In dem Beschwörungsritual der Frau Nikkaluzzi sind zwei Defixionspuppen – eine aus Lehm und die andere aus Zedernholz – genannt; auf die erstere ist der Name des Prinzen PU-Šarrum(m)a, und auf die andere ‘der Name des Feindes der Majestät’ geschrieben.²⁴
- (6) Auch in der Großreichszeit wird Zauberei am hethitischen Hof ausgeübt; so klagt Hattušili, noch König von Ḫakmiš(ša), seinen Verwandten und politischen Gegner Arma-Tarḫuntašša der Zauberei an, worauf dieser teilweise enteignet wird.

On the same tack M. Hutter (1991), 34f. has written, ‘Ich möchte beginnen mit einem recht bekannten Beispiel, nämlich dem Ritual gegen die bösen ‘Zungen’, die Ziplantawija gegen ihren Bruder, den König Tudhalija, seine Gattin Nikalmati und deren Kinder gemacht hat, so daß es notwendig wurde, durch einen Abwehrzauber die königliche Familie von diesen ‘Zungen’ und Behexungen zu reinigen. ... Insgesamt kann man die Stellung Ziplantawijas somit wohl dahingehend umschreiben, daß sie sich eines Schadenzaubers gegen die Königsfamilie bedient.’²⁵

M. Popko (1995), 83 expresses similar views when he writes that ‘Black magic was practiced alongside white magic. It was commonly considered harmful and was officially prohibited. Mentions from the times of Hattušili I and Telipinu indicate that black magic played a role even at the royal court, as an element of the intrigues and plotting, which Old Hittite history was so full of.’

Even more ardently, A. Ünal has written (1996), 58ff., ‘*Ziplantawiya* is also well attested in connection with her malevolent magical manipulations against *Tuthaliya*, her own brother, and against *Nikalmati*, his wife the queen, and their children in the magic ritual KBo 15.10. ... We can assume that *Atta* was among the children of *Tuthaliya-Nikalmati*, the royal couple, who have been bewitched by their malicious aunt *Ziplantawija*. Nemesis came, however, upon the evil-doer very soon, since according to the above cited [text] she shares a common fate with *Atta*, the queen and the crown prince ...’.

And finally, M. Forlanini (2005), 239 writes, ‘ferner versuchte seine (Mursili’s) Stiefmutter auch die Gemahlin des Muršili durch Magie zu töten,’ and further, ‘Welche Reaktionen die Ernennung des Arnuwanda zum Kronprinz in der “konservativen” Partei des Hofes erweckte, können wir zur Zeit nur vermuten; sicher gehört dazu der Fall der Königsschwester Ziplantawija, die die Königin Nikalmati und deren Söhne verfluchte, was man aus dem bekannten Ritual CTH 443 schließen kann.’

What all these references to these oft-cited passages have in common is the assumption that the person accused of performing black magic actually did so. These modern scholars have adopted the position of those Hittites who long ago accused their rivals of black magic,²⁶ occasionally even expressing negative emotions toward them by referring to them and their actions as malicious, malevolent and evil-doer.

²⁴ See also M. Hutter (1991), 39f. For Nos. 4 and 5 belonging to a grey area between white and black magic, see above and n. 3.

²⁵ Similarly in M. Hutter (1998), 84 and n. 19.

²⁶ Cf. e.g. W. Rummel – R. Voltmer (2008), 14.

Accusations as Evidence?

It may be suggested, in contrast, that none of these passages should be taken as constituting any evidence whatsoever for these accused persons having performed black magic.²⁷ As can be gleaned even from several of the citations above, all of these accusations of black magic are embedded within highly politicized and hostile situations, so that one must be immediately deeply suspicious of the credibility and motivation of the accusers.

In the first case, that of Ḫattusili I's complaints about Ḫastayar's dealings with the 'old women', it is not even at all clear that black magic is at issue. The passage in question (KUB 1.16+40.65 iv 64 ff.) has most recently been treated by J. Klingner (2005), 146:

Der Großkönig, der *labarna*, sagt immer wieder zur *Ḫaštajar*: »Ignoriere du mich [d.h. die Ratschläge] doch nicht, dann spräche der König nicht so zu ihr [dir¹ oder ihm²]. Die Hofjunker aber sagen: »Sie fährt fort, die Alten Frauen zu befragen.« Der König aber sagt so: »Befragt sie jetzt noch die Alten Frauen? Ich weiß es nicht.« – »Ignoriere mich nicht weiter! [Nei]n! Befrage nur mich! Und meine Worte werde ich dir offenbaren.«

Presumably it is generally assumed that black magic is the issue in this passage because the 'old women' mentioned are often involved in beneficial magical practices in other texts,

²⁷ Alice Mouton (2010) 110, n. 18, in her highly informative overview of sorcery in the Hittite texts, expresses reservations concerning this, one might say, minimalistic approach to the sources, writing, 'Dans sa communication, J. Miller insiste sur l'in vraisemblance des actes de sorcellerie imputés aux différents personnages historiques. Mais en insistant sur cet aspect, c'est son propre point de vue qu'il présente, et non pas celui des supposées victimes de ces actes, qui croient bel et bien en l'existence de la sorcellerie. ... Ils [nos collègues hittitologues] se contentent, dans leurs études, de se placer du point de vue des Hittites qui, eux, regardaient la sorcellerie comme une réponse possible à un problème.' In response, I should repeat that I do not wish to deny that black magic was practiced in any particular case or that it was practiced in general. I merely deny that the accusations and perceptions of the victims of black magic found in the texts constitute any evidence for it. Second, I emphatically agree that the supposed victims of perceived acts of sorcery believed in the reality of black magic; indeed this is a main focus of my paper. Third, I agree entirely that the Hittites regarded magic as one response to the challenges they faced. Regarding researchers taking the point of view of the traditional peoples they study, however, a more nuanced view seems in order. On the one hand, the modern researcher should certainly attempt to understand, as much as is possible, the phenomena in question from the viewpoint of those involved. This does not, however, mean that we should believe what the Hittites believed. One can strive to understand what the Hittites felt and believed about their god Telipinu, for example, but this does not mean that one has to actually believe in Telipinu. On the contrary, in such cases – and, one might suggest, in the case of modern religious phenomena as well – the researcher most profitably views these beliefs from outside the perspective of the religious community in question in order to understand, e.g. Telipinu's role in the pantheon and the supernatural belief system as a whole. In this sense, only when one realizes that accusations and perceptions of black magic are not the same thing as the practice of black magic can one begin to understand what is happening in the minds and communities of those involved and why. The modern researcher can, of course, realize full well that the persons of a given society hold various unquestioned beliefs and strive to understand the consequences and dynamics of those beliefs without believing likewise. Cf. also n. 19.

but the context here does not seem to necessitate or even suggest this connection.²⁸ The problem that Ḫattusili complains about seems to be Ḫastayar's going to the 'old women' to ask them about something, to consult them. And since the 'old women' are also well attested performing oracle inquiries, for example, one should perhaps assume that Ḫattusili was piqued at the fact that she was consulting the 'old women' and their oracular investigations rather than, as he says in his following statement, with him, probably because he wished to maintain a feeling of full control over the royal family. And of course, even the comparatively innocuous interpretation that she was seeking oracular wisdom is uncertain. It may well be that she was simply consulting with 'old women' in their function as wise persons.

In the second case Tudḫaliya and/or Nikkalmadi commissioned a text containing rituals intended to purify and protect them from black magic, which they assume had been performed against them by Tudḫaliya's sister, Ziplantawiya. However, the political/familial situation at the time was certainly a very tenuous one, even if we know precious little about Ziplantawiya herself. It is likely, e. g., that Tudḫaliya was not the son of a reigning king, but of Kantuzzili, whose lineage is unknown and who fought alongside Tudḫaliya to gain the throne. One might speculate that he might have belonged to the line of kings displaced by Muwattalli I's coup (e. g. J. Miller (2004), 5–9). Further, whether Tudḫaliya had a son and heir remains an open question (M. Marizza (2007), 2 ff. and n. 12), a highly volatile state of affairs in any monarchy, and some assume that Arnuwanda was married to a daughter of Tudḫaliya and Nikkalmati in order to remedy the situation. Perhaps Tudḫaliya feared that Ziplantawiya might attempt to manipulate the situation, including through the use of black magic against him and his family, in order to raise a son of hers to the throne. It is further generally assumed that Tudḫaliya married a foreign Kizzuwatnean princess, and this novum for the Hittites of the period might also have caused consternation in certain circles. Certainly, much of this is speculative, but it should be clear that one need not look too far for potential tension among the royal family during the reign of Tudḫaliya I, and it would not be at all surprising if accusations or the assumption of black magic, such as that made by Tudḫaliya and Nikkalmadi, were quite common.

The political power struggle between Mursili and his stepmother, the widow of Suppiliuma, the Tawannanna which he eventually banished, is, in contrast, well documented, even if the only sources relating the events give us Mursili's perspective alone. In his prayers concerning the death of his wife and the banishment of the Tawannanna (I. Singer (2002), Nr. 17, § 3'), Mursili claims that she had turned over his father's entire estate to the 'Stone-House of the gods', an institution which apparently stood under her control or influence. Mursili accuses her of buying influence in Ḫatti to his detriment. And he apparently felt so threatened by her power that he eventually banished her from Ḫattusa, stripping her also of her position as priestess, from which much of her power must have

²⁸ Indeed, in Vieyra's formulation ('et sans doute aussi dans des buts moins licites'), most of the evil and illicit nature of whatever it was that Ḫastayar was doing is inserted into the situation parenthetically by Vieyra, though the 'old women' are in fact rarely portrayed in a negative light. What Vieyra has essentially done is to project onto Ḫastayar his conception, according to which black magic is often attested among the Hittites, and according to which the ones perpetrating these crimes were women.

stemmed. In such a politically charged atmosphere, to lend any credibility to Mursili's accusations against the Tawannanna of practising black magic is simply irrational.

And the power struggles between Ḫattusili III and his rival, Arma-Tarḫunta, are even better documented, if even more tendentiously. In his Apology, Ḫattusili recounts (Th. van den Hout (1997), 200):

Since Ištar, My Lady, had shown me her recognition, and my brother, Muwatalli, had been benevolent to me, ... they envied me. Arma-tarhunta ... began to cause me harm, ... and defeat hung over me. My brother, Muwatalli, summoned me to court. ... And through [my] deity I was acquitted. ... But when Arma-tarhunta ... saw the benevolence of Ištar, My Lady, and of my brother towards me, he and his wife and his son began to cast spells over me, because they were not successful in any (other) way.

That Arma-Tarḫunta had used black magic against him was then confirmed in a court case, and Ḫattusili was vindicated by being allowed to confiscate Arma-Tarḫunta's entire estate. It may be suggested, however, that there is no need at all to assume that these accusations of sorcery were true, and that it is entirely possible that they were nothing but trumped up charges, smear tactics aimed at attaining wealth and power through the downfall of a nemesis.²⁹ At the same time, it is not unlikely that Ḫattusili, having suffered some perceived misfortune at some point, concluded that he had been accursed, and that he may in fact have believed that Arma-Tarḫunta's clan was the persecuting party. Ḫattusili's convictions, however, constitute no evidence whatsoever for Arma-Tarḫunta having actually practiced black magic.

Can an accusation of black magic really be deemed credible in such politically charged environments? While one cannot categorically exclude that black magic was performed, certainly a severe scepticism in these cases is appropriate. In my view, these accusations constitute not the slightest evidence for the practice of black magic among the Hittites.

Thankfully, one does occasionally find more sceptical assessments in the secondary literature,³⁰ such as that of Y. Cohen (2003), 875, when he writes concerning,

... the treatment occasionally reserved for the Tawannanna figure in the Old Hittite period (in the Testament and Edict of Ḫattušili I), and of the more contemporary banishment of (the) Tawannanna, Šuppiluliuma's Babylonian wife, by Muršili, or of the removal of princess Danuḫepa by Muwatalli. These women were accused of multiple crimes (most commonly witchcraft), but there is no doubt that these trumped-up accusations were simply meant to remove them (and in some cases their sons) from power.

²⁹ In P. Maille's words (2008), 'The ability of the culturally powerful to label their critics and challengers with the pejorative term of magic played a significant role in maintaining the *status quo*.' Similarly M. Hutter (1991), 32: 'Wie eng Religion und Politik in den Kulturen des Alten Vorderen Orients ineinander verflochten sind, wird etwa an jenen Fällen sichtbar, welche zeigen, wie magische Handlungsweisen verwendet werden, um – in unserem Fall – politische Widersacher auszuschalten.'

³⁰ A. Goetze's early comments (1957), 153f., where he notes that we hear of 'Fluchzauber' mostly indirectly, and that direct evidence for it is rare, are also rather nuanced.

And J. Klinger (2002), 149bc has similarly stated the obvious, that ‘Es dürfte demnach ein ebenso probates Mittel gewesen sein, einen Kontrahenten zu verdächtigen, sich der Magie zu bedienen, wie dies für Hattušili III. (ca. 1265–1240 v. Chr.) belegt ist, der noch bevor er sich des Thrones bemächtigte, im internen Machtkampf einen seiner Widersacher mit diesem Vorwurf überzog.’

This scepticism is no intractable obscurantism or post-modern deconstructionism, which – at least in its avatar that its opponents prefer to attack – likes to think one cannot ascertain anything based on the texts. No, there are further very concrete reasons for the scepticism, as well as clear historical parallels that cast doubt on the veracity of the accusations and assumptions in the texts. Neither does this inclination toward refusing to accept these attestations as evidence of black magic stem from the political and polemic nature of these specific texts alone, but also from several further considerations relating to situations from texts of diverse genres. These deliberations relate to: (1) thought structures and world views in which one might tend to consider him/herself hexed; (2) how one determined in such a world view who had hexed him/her; and (3) the fear of black magic and the causes and sources of this fear.

Intentioned Cause in ‘Closed Systems’

In this context one must constantly and consciously keep in mind the world, the system of thought, in which the Hittites and other ancient and traditional peoples lived and live. In general, any and every misfortune was assumed to be the result of an intentioned or purposeful being inflicting the sufferer with misery.³¹ In other words, if one slips on some ice while stepping out of the house and breaks one’s leg, it is not considered to be a random accident of mere physical cause and effect. If one succumbs to an infectious disease, it is not assumed to be the result of biological processes. If the harvest withers away and the village starves, it is not chalked up to the effects of El Niño.³² No, someone, either a person with magical powers and a grudge to bear or some disgruntled deity with malevolent intent, must have caused or allowed the accident to happen, inflicted the victim with the disease or brought about the drought. This means, of course, that whenever a Hittite king (or peasant) experienced some misfortune, he had necessarily been either cursed by some malicious enemy or had one way or another angered a deity. Some intentional malevolence *must* be behind the calamity. It was not a relevant question *if* someone had purposefully caused his misfortune. The relevant questions were who had caused it, why and what could be done to remedy the effects?

Naturally, this system of thought or belief is extremely common, quite nearly universal, among human cultures. A few excerpts from a report by Phil Mercer on the BBC online news page of Jan. 26, 2007 illustrate several beliefs associated with such systems, as well as a number of other issues that will be touched upon presently:

³¹ See e.g. W. Behringer (2006), 268, M. K. Roach (2003), xxiiiif. or B. P. Levack (2003), 160ff., who notes that hail storms, of all things, were the most common catalyst for accusations of sorcery in the Early Modern period, long-term plagues only comparatively rarely.

³² For further such examples and related considerations, see e.g. C. Bell (1997), 48–49, 116–117.

Police in Papua New Guinea say four women accused of using sorcery to cause a fatal road crash have been murdered. It is believed the victims were tortured by fellow villagers in a remote highland region 400 km (250 miles) north of [the] capital Port Moresby. Police believe they were forced to confess to witchcraft after they were stabbed with hot metal rods. ... These four women had been accused by fellow villagers of using sorcery to cause a car crash in which three prison guards died. ... Death and mysterious illness are sometimes blamed on evil curses and suspected sorcerers are often blamed and killed. Researchers have found that the victims are usually elderly women with little influence in the village.

Seeking the Villain

And how did the Hittites discover who they assumed must have been seeking their harm? Apart from what one might call simple ‘common sense’, a primary means of discovering the answers to such questions were of course the various oracular arts, a highly developed and well-attested business among the Hittites and other cuneiform cultures. Thus, in order to determine the answer to a question that was itself based on a series of faulty assumptions, the Hittites turned to methods that, surely it can be agreed, were and are clearly not effective.³³ That modern scholars would, in this light, accept to any degree Hittite assertions that someone had practiced malevolent magic is indeed remarkable.

The question of whether an individual had bewitched or cursed another person is occasionally the object of oracular investigation in the Hittite texts.³⁴ One can therefore be relatively certain that this is how it was generally, or at least often, established that a person had practiced black magic or uttered curses against someone. In one late oracle text, for example, the Hittite king and his diviners attempt to discover if, and if so, how exactly a certain Mashuiliwa, a vassal ruler in western Anatolia, had cursed a statue of the Hittite king, called a *zawalli*-deity, which stood in the vassal’s palace (KUB 5.6++ iii 12 ff.; Th. van den Hout (1998), 3–5): ‘Concerning the fact that the uttering of curses by Mashuiliwa before the deity has been established by oracle: Has Mashuiliwa uttered curses before the *zawalli*-deity of the House of His Majesty which he kept in Arzawa? If so, then let the first visceral omen be unfavourable. (Observations). Unfavourable. (Further observations). Favourable. They continued with the oracular inquiry.’³⁵ Naturally, such a methodology strikes one as ridiculous today, and one might suggest that the technique was exactly as effective then as it would be today, i. e., not in the slightest.³⁶ It cannot, therefore, by any means be taken seriously by the modern scholar when a Hittite text asserts that it had been established that a person had engaged in black magic.

³³ Whether the thought processes in which the participants of an oracular investigation engaged were effective or not is of course another question, a question that is naturally independent of the issue of the efficacy of oracular inquiry.

³⁴ See, e.g. R. Strauß (2006), 19 f.

³⁵ For oracle inquiries relating to the Mursili vs. Tawannanna case, see KBo 4.8+İzmir Col. ii 6’–11’ (H. A. Hoffner (1983), 188; Th. van den Hout (1998), 41–44).

³⁶ For ominous signs used to determine guilt in the medieval period, see e.g. B. P. Levack (2003), 76 f.

Naturally, if one is not inclined to go to the trouble and expense of seeking the villain through oracular means, one need not be deterred; one can simply make it up. As V. Haas (2003), 579, for example, has noted regarding the Mesopotamian context, when figures are employed in a defensive magical ritual as representing sorcerer and victim, and if a personal name is attached to or written on a figure, it is written only on the figure of the victim, never the sorcerer. ‘Da dabei niemals der Name des Schadenstifters, wohl aber der Name des Behexten erscheint, ist davon auszugehen, daß der Schadenstifter zumeist nicht bekannt war.’ Since it was as a rule not known who might have accursed the victim, it is also a very suspect assumption that descriptions, even elaborate quotes, of curses uttered and ritual actions employed by the attacking sorcerer, which one finds embedded within defensive ritual treatments, indeed reflect uttered curses and performed actions. In fact, it seems highly unlikely that the ritual practitioner called in to heal one’s ailments or purify one’s property will have actually witnessed the supposed bewitchment of the person or place to be treated.

One can therefore hardly understand, for example, the delightfully creative anti-sorcery speech and acts performed by the ritualist of the Ritual of Samuḫa³⁷ as a *reflection* of black magic performed by the would-be villain.³⁸ To the contrary, it is in all likelihood a *projection* of how the ritualist imagined one might curse a temple.³⁹ In other words, the illicit witchcraft, as a rule, is imagined to have taken place in certain ways by those who feel they

³⁷ KUB 29.7+KBo 21.41 rev. 36–41: “Afterward, however, they give her an o[nio]n, and she speaks thereby as follows: ‘If someone h[as spok]en before the deity thus: ‘Just as this onion is enwrapped with skin, and the one (layer) does [not] let the other f[ree], let evil and oath, curse and defilement keep that temple enwrapped like an on[io]n!’ Now I myself have peeled this o[ni]on, [and] I have left one bare stem. Let the evil word, curs[e, oa]th and defilement likewise peel away from the deity! And let the deity and the ritual-candidate be undefiled by that [mat]ter!’” (EGIR-an-da-ma-aš-ši š[u-up-pí-wa-aš-ḫa]r^{SAR} pí-an-zi an-da-ma-kán ki-iš-ša-an me-ma-i ma-a-an-wa A-NA PA-NI DINGIR-Lì⁽³⁷⁾ku-iš-ki ki-iš-ša-an me-[mi-an ḫar]-zi ka-a-aš-wa ma-a-aḫ-ḫa-an šu-up-pí-wa-aš-ḫar^{SAR} ḫu-ur-pa-aš-ta-az an-da ḫu-u-la-li-ia-an-za⁽³⁸⁾nu a-ra-aš a-ra-an a[r-ḫa ū-UL] tar-na-i i-da-a-la-u-wa-an-zi-ia NI-IŠ DINGIR-Lì-ia ḫu-ur-ta-iš pa-ap-ra-an-na-a[n-z]a-ša⁽³⁹⁾LEJ-ni É.DINGIR-Lì šu-up-pí-[wa-aš-ḫa-na]-aš i-wa-ar an-da ḫu-u-la-li-ia-an ḫar-du ki-nu-na ka-a-ša ku-u-un šu-u[p-pí-w]a-aš-ḫar^{SAR}⁽⁴⁰⁾lar-ḫa ši-ip-pa-nu-un [na-an-š]a-an kat-ta 1 ka-a-ki-in da-wa-ni-in kur-ku-un i-da-a-lu-ia ut-tar NI-IŠ DINGIR-[Lì ḫu-u]r-ta-iš⁽⁴¹⁾pa-ap-ra-a-tar A-NA DINGIR-L[ì kat-t]a ar-ḫa QA-TAM-MA ši-ip-pa-id-du nu DINGIR-LU₄ EN.SÍSKUR-ia a-pé-e-e[z ud-d]a-na-az pâr-ku-wa-e-eš a-ša-an-du).

³⁸ Pace e.g. G. Torri (2003), 32: “Nel testo a noi noto come “Rituale de Šamuḫa”, CTH 480, la maga “dal naso mozzo” (KIR₁₄-ŠU ḫattanza) include nelle sue recitazioni, quelle che dovevano essere state le formule pronunciate da uno stregone avversario, contrapponendo esplicitamente alla magia negativa, la sua azione di contra-magio.”

³⁹ Indeed, this was even clear to the performing ritualist herself, as she prefaced her counter-magical utterances and actions with ‘If someone has ...’. One might perhaps reasonably conclude that the imagination of this ritualist should lead us in the right direction when searching for black magic performed by the Hittites, but this would be based on assumptions regarding the ritualist’s general knowledge of magical practices, the applicability of her knowledge also to harmful magic and her imagination functioning in a manner similar to a would-be sorcerer’s, etc., not on the assumption that her quotes and description of the sorcerer reflect direct knowledge of the would-be sorcerer’s actions.

have been affected by it and by those invited to counteract it, and countermeasures are conceived accordingly.⁴⁰

The Fear of Black Magic and the Sources of that Fear

It was suggested a moment ago that many of the passages often taken as evidence for black magic actually attest not to the practice of black magic, but to the fear of black magic, a simple and important distinction which is surprisingly often ignored.⁴¹ This fear of black magic, clearly, can be very real indeed, and a society which functions on the basis of such fear and beliefs renders moot in a sense the question of whether black magic had in fact been practiced or not. A person who believes in the efficacy of black (or white) magic can experience dramatic placebo effects,⁴² whether it has actually been practiced against him/her or not, and beliefs of any type, be they well grounded or not, can radically influence behaviour and therefore lead to far-reaching consequences.

Is one justified, however, in assuming that this very real, very prevalent and well-attested *fear* of black magic in turn indicates that the *practice* of black magic was also widespread? Not necessarily.⁴³ It can be clearly demonstrated from a variety of sources, ancient, late medieval, early modern⁴⁴ and modern, that a rampant and fanatical fear of black magic and similar phenomena need have no basis in reality whatsoever. For example, a report by Heba Saleh in the BBC online news page of Feb. 14, 2008 reads:

Human Rights Watch has appealed to Saudi Arabia to halt the execution of a woman convicted of witchcraft. In a letter to King Abdullah, the rights group described the trial and conviction of Fawza Falih as a miscarriage of justice. The illiterate woman was detained by religious police in 2005 and allegedly beaten and forced to fingerprint a confession that she could not read. Among her accusers was a man who alleged she [had] made him impotent. ... Its letter to King Abdullah says the woman was tried for the

⁴⁰ Similarly Schwemer's (in press, sub 'Witchcraft: the dark side of magic') assessment of the pattern of Mesopotamian rites: '...antiwitchcraft rituals often comprised mirror-image performances of the rituals that the sorcerers had supposedly carried out against the patient'.

⁴¹ Refreshingly, not always, e.g. J. Klinger (2002), 148: 'Die Texte lassen vermuten, daß die Furcht vor solchem »Schadenszauber« relativ weit verbreitet war, auch wenn dieser unter Strafe stand.'

⁴² With e.g. R. Strauß (2006), 18f.; see also M. K. Roach (2003), xxiii.

⁴³ The inquisitor Alonso Salazar wrote concerning a witch-hunt in 1610 that 'die Sache begann, nachdem Bruder Domingo de Sarda dorthin gekommen war, um über diese Dinge zu predigen. ... Es gab dort weder Hexen noch Verhexte, bevor darüber geredet und geschrieben wurde' (in B. P. Levack (2003), 157).

⁴⁴ Naturally, the parallels with the witchcraft and witch hunts of the Medieval and Early Modern periods mentioned in this paper should not obscure the significant differences, nor can all phenomena noted from these later periods be assumed for the Hittite world. To mention just two examples, one does not find much evidence for the category or stereotypical image of the 'witch' in the Hittite documentation (also in contrast to the Mesopotamian material; see e.g. D. Schwemer (2007a), in press; nor are 'white' and 'black' magic separated in Hittite society into magic performed by a recognized institutional religion and that practiced outside of it, as in the Christian setting (see also n. 5).

undefined crime of witchcraft and that her conviction was on the basis of the written statements of witnesses who said that she had bewitched them.

One might suggest that a process similar to that which is seen in the Hittite texts has occurred here. A man becomes frustrated with his own impotence; he assumes that some intentioned being, be it god or man, has cursed or bewitched him; and his suspicion falls on whoever is unfortunate enough to occupy his mind or cross his path. The woman need not actually have practiced black magic against him.⁴⁵ His personal misfortune, his search for malevolent intent and his fear of black magic in general are sufficient for him to make the accusation. Unfortunately for those persons in societies with such beliefs, accusations of this sort can be taken brutally seriously.

Countless such examples are also documented from the late Medieval and early Modern Periods. Fear of werewolves was apparently quite common, but this fear constitutes not the slightest evidence whatsoever for the concrete reality of werewolves. The fear clearly results from fantastical extrapolations from reality and fears of real things, such as wolves, and is usually associated with other fears, such as fear of darkness, of astronomical phenomena like the full moon, and so forth. Perhaps even the rare genetic mutation whereby a person grows an unusual amount of hair on the face and other areas that normally have little hair could have played a role. The point is that one hardly need postulate the existence of werewolves to account for the fear of and belief in werewolves and the associated legends and fantasies. Neither must one postulate the existence of Bigfoot, Mormon, Moses or Xenu in order to account for the firm convictions of many millions of believers. One hardly need posit the existence of witches flying on their brooms through the night to explain the late Medieval and early Modern period laws prohibiting witches from flying on their brooms.⁴⁶ One need not assume the real practice of witchcraft in all its most outrageous forms to account for the elaborate and fantastical expositions of the *Malleus Maleficarum*.⁴⁷ The human mind is capable of, indeed, given the proper cultural setting, strongly tends toward, wildly fantastical explanations and outlandish elaborations to account for its fears and for its failure to understand various phenomena.

For these reasons it seems that proper scepticism is warranted in regard to the central thesis of M. Hutter's (1991) paper, according to which the dramatic increase in the production of counter-magical ritual texts in the Middle Hittite period can be related to the insecure political situation of the age, with its assassinations, intrigues and proliferation of black magic.⁴⁸ This conclusion seems not to be warranted, first, because the period is hardly

⁴⁵ During my presentation of this material for the Kolloquium zum Alten Orient (see n. 1), a member of the audience actually cried out at this point, 'Aber es gab Zeugen!' On the question of eyewitnesses, see presently.

⁴⁶ See e.g. W. Rummel – R. Voltmer (2008), 15, B. P. Levack (2003), 52 ff.

⁴⁷ See e.g. H. P. Broedel (2003). This largely invalidates the common counterargument, which suggests that since laws against murder, e.g., must have been conceived as a reaction to real cases of murder, then laws against witchcraft must have been conceived as a reaction to real cases of witchcraft. The two are not necessarily parallel, and the comparison is hardly conclusive. Murder can be independently corroborated, flying on brooms has to my knowledge not yet been.

⁴⁸ Similarly, e.g. R. Strauß (2006), 17 f.

more characterized by such political uproar than any other period in Hittite history, as M. Hutter himself admits (1991), 33; second, because the production of many different text genres, such as the instructions, show a dramatic increase during this period, which certainly cannot be attributed to rampant use of black magic; and third, as has been argued in the foregoing paragraphs, the connection between fear of and belief in black magic on the one hand and concrete events and practice of such black magic on the other is extremely tenuous.⁴⁹ Again, one need not posit a rapid increase in the practice of black magic in order to account for the rapid increase in efforts to counter black magic as attested in the MH textual sources.

Further Considerations

There also seems to be a disconnect in the secondary literature regarding some cultures as opposed to others. Surely very few of us would understand the accusations and hysteria surrounding the Salem witch trials in New England in the late 17th century or the witch hunts in Europe in the late Medieval and early Modern Periods as indications that the practice of black magic was unusually rampant, or at least, more widespread than at any other point before or afterwards. No, those who are even remotely familiar with these spectacular cases of frenzied group-think realize that such socio-religious phenomena can develop a life of their own and spread like wildfire through a society without resting on any degree of solid evidence whatsoever. Yet similarly incredible or suspect accusations in the Hittite texts are understood by modern Hittitologists and historians of religion to be evidence for black magic.

If one rejects all these indications as evidence for the practice of black magic, is there anything, one might ask, that one could consider credible evidence for the practice of black magic? Perhaps eyewitness accounts have at least some credibility? Well, no. Here also, one must be very cautious, for a multitude of reasons, though only a few can be briefly touched upon in the present forum.⁵⁰

First of all, black magic is by its very nature an act that will hardly ever have any witnesses. Because it is forbidden by law, and because of the strong social stigma attached to it, it is an act that would generally be practiced in secret in order to exclude witnesses. This fact alone makes it quite unlikely that eyewitness accounts will be available. Of course, persons claiming to be eyewitnesses may fall from heaven like raindrops, but actual eyewitnesses will be rare.

At least one attestation of court testimony to black magic being practised is extant in the Hittite corpus.⁵¹ Unfortunately, the passage is rather poorly preserved, so that one should not place too much weight on its contents. Despite its poor preservation, though, one can recognize telltale signs that the testimony may be very suspect indeed. First, it is not even

⁴⁹ See e.g. B. P. Levack (2003), 151.

⁵⁰ For considerations on eye-witness (un)reliability in the context of the US legal system, see e.g. B. N. Cardozo (2009).

⁵¹ KUB 40.83; R. Werner (1967), 64–65.

clear that the witness claims to have seen the events himself; it may be that he has heard the claims from others. Second, the events are said to have occurred at night and in the forest, temporal and spatial settings that universally lend themselves to confusion, conjecture, fear and fantasy. Third, one of the accused seems to have been a childless woman, perhaps a widow, and it is well known and documented that it is precisely such persons who tend to inhabit the fringes of society who are liable to be the victims of such accusations.⁵² The accusations, therefore, that these persons wrote the names of three individuals upon what we might call voodoo dolls and then buried them, can be seen with a healthy degree of scepticism. Even apart from the red flags to be found in the testimony of this court case, though, it is abundantly attested across a wide range of cultures that accusations of witchcraft, in proper court settings or not, are often complete nonsense, nothing but the silly fantasy of kooky persons or overly excited misinterpretations of otherwise perfectly normal phenomena.

Another aspect that might be mentioned, demonstrably true of late Medieval and early Modern suspicions of witchcraft, perhaps also of Hittite accusations, is the fact that a person who was known to employ magical means in his or her role as a legitimate medicine-doctor could easily and quickly become suspected of employing black magic if the patient became worse or died instead of improving.

It must also be noted that in most societies that have witnessed significant witch paranoia, women, and especially old women, have borne the brunt of the persecution. Explanations for this fact can appeal both to pragmatic concerns and to a general trend toward misogyny in most cultures of the world. On the pragmatic side, women in many societies are often involved in tasks, such as cooking, midwifery, gathering and applying of medicinal herbs, etc., which can easily be misinterpreted by a person seeking a cause for his or her misfortune.⁵³ On the misogynistic side, it is well known that witch hunts in many societies which experience them are often closely connected with projection of sexual conceptions and desires,⁵⁴ misogynist prejudices and spurned romantic hopes.⁵⁵

Further, it is well known that frequently enough persons accused of witchcraft have either experienced fantasies or dreams concerning such situations, so that no few persons accused of these acts actually believe themselves to have performed black magic.⁵⁶ Pheno-

⁵² See e.g. K. Stratton (2007), Y. Sefati – J. Klein (2002), B. P. Levack (2003), 143ff., W. Behringer (2006), 273 and A. Mouton (2010).

⁵³ See, e.g. W. Rummel – R. Voltmer (2008), 27f., 71f., B. P. Levack (2003), 25, 136ff., M. K. Roach (2002), xx.

⁵⁴ See e.g. B. P. Levack (2003), 60.

⁵⁵ Surely these would be more plausible reasons for women being more often associated with the magical arts than any tendency for them to be hysterical or owing to their nervous crises, as V. Haas (1988), 239a has claimed, in following Mauss' century-old ruminations. For evidence and analysis suggesting that women were not, in fact, more commonly associated with it in the Hittite material, see J. Miller (2004), 488–492. In any case, as Birgit Christiansen (pers. comm.) pointed out to me, the number of concrete accusations of black magic attested in the Hittite corpus is actually quite limited considering the extent of the documentation. Whether this might indicate that a common practice only rarely found its way into the written record or that its practice was not as common as its perception is an interesting but presumably unanswerable question.

⁵⁶ See e.g. B. P. Levack (2003), 31, 54.

mena which one today would refer to as suggestibility, crowd psychology and memory planting are of course nothing new, they are only new terms to describe phenomena that have always accompanied human culture, and there is no reason not to suspect that they will have played a role in suspicion and accusation of witchcraft as well.⁵⁷

Not only dream and fantasy and other psychological phenomena often play a role with those accused of witchcraft, the fact that the accused are more often than not older persons, especially women, is universally understood to be related to the fact that older persons more often suffer from illnesses such as dementia, senility, schizophrenia and other medical issues, some symptoms of which can easily create suspicion in the minds of those who witness them.⁵⁸ Who, for example, has never seen a mentally-ill homeless person speaking nonsense and swearing at the demons inside his or her own head? Such persons who live in societies that attribute this kind of behaviour to supernatural forces rather than chemical imbalances and damaged neural connections often quickly find themselves subject to charges of black magic.

Summary

Several persons including a number of women were accused in the Hittite texts of performing black magic, a crime punishable by death. Despite scanty and highly questionable evidence, the scholarly community has largely accepted the Hittite view, with little to no reference to the all-too-well-known dynamics of modern and historically well-attested parallels. Accusation, suspicion, fantasy, the oracular arts and perhaps crude misogyny have been accepted by too many modern researchers as evidence.

As is so often the case when one is forced to take a step backwards, the perspective advocated here may deprive us of something we thought we knew, and this may be perceived as a loss. At the same time, a step backwards may place the scholarly community before pathways that offer much potential; potential to better understand how conceptions, misconceptions, fears, emotions, accusations and context relating to the subject of black magic may have existed and functioned in society.

⁵⁷ A further cultural universal is of course drug use, and its potential influence on belief in and perception of sorcery is an entire subject in itself that this paper will not address.

⁵⁸ See e.g. B. P. Levack (2003), 29, 139ff., 147ff.

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