

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

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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 *dérôr* in der hurritisch-hethitischen Serie ‘Freilassung’ (*parā*