

Relations between God and Man in the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release*

MARY R. BACHVAROVA
WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Only a dim outline of the plot of the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Release* can be gleaned from the fragments that remain. The proemium (KBo 32.11) does tell us it is about the destruction of Ebla. The gods Teššub, Allani, and Ishara are involved, and a human hero, Pizikarra of Nineveh, will carry it out. Why the North Syrian city must be destroyed, however, is unclear. KBo 32.15, 19, and 20 tell us it has to do with the Eblaites' refusal to release certain captives, the people of the town of Ikinkalis, but why should Teššub feel the need to take their side, and why are these people obligated to render service to the nobles of Ebla? The assembly scene preserved in KBo 32.15 provides a further problem, the description of Teššub's suffering. Up to now scholars have attempted to argue that the description is fictive or sarcastic, perhaps finding it difficult to imagine that the gods could be thought to suffer "like men."¹ Here I offer a unified solution to these problems in the light of parallels from other Hittite and Hurro-Hittite texts. These show that Teššub's suffering is caused by neglect of his cult, since the people of Ikinkalis, because they are being forced to work for the Eblaite nobles, cannot fulfil the ritual obligations owed to him and to the royal ancestor cult of Ebla; this is the reason for Teššub's punishment of Ebla.

The study I present here is only the first step towards understanding how the *Song of Release* achieved its final form at Hattusa. Until now, there has been little effort to compare the *Song of Release* to Hittite texts or even to other texts in the Hurro-Hittite SIR₃ genre, although Neu noted some similarities with the *Annals of Hattusili I* and an Old Hittite instruction text. For the most part, scholars have attempted to understand the text as a product of Old Babylonian North Syria, focusing on the time and place of the story the text tells. Eblaite texts have indeed elucidated key details of the text, and I myself will make use of archaeological evidence from Ebla to support the interpretation I present here. Yet, the *Song of Release* was found at Hattusa, and it was translated into Middle Hittite. We should entertain the possibility that between the time of its first composition, when the event it describes was still fresh in its original audience's memory, and the time it was finally translated

Abbreviations follow those in the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary*. In the discussion of KBo 32.15 which follows I rely mainly on the Hittite translation of the Hurrian text. I follow the edition of Neu (1996a) and the interpretation of Wilhelm (1997) as revised in Wilhelm (2001) except where noted. I draw attention to significant differences in the Hurrian version from the Hittite one in the footnotes, as well as to significant differences in my translation from that of Hoffner (1998a: 75ff.) and Wilhelm (2001). I would like to thank Richard Beal and Gary Beckman for their advice and suggestions to improve this article. My great debt to my teacher, Prof. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., will be evident to the reader.

1. So Neu 1993: 347–48; 1996a: 298–89, etc.; see discussion in Wilhelm 1997: 281–82. Haas and Wegner (Haas and Wegner 1991: 386; Haas 1994: 552; Haas and Wegner 1997: 439, 442–43) and de Martino (2000: 309, 314) also consider the description not to reflect reality, although they believe that Teššub was held captive earlier in the narrative by Allani, when he was entertained in the Netherworld (KBo 32.13).