



IX. ULUSLARARASI HİTİTOLOJİ KONGRESİ BİLDİRİLERİ

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“WHEN THE STORM GOD THUNDERS”: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON HITTITE THUNDER FESTIVALS

*Francesco G. BARSACCHI**

Introduction¹

The group of Hittite tablets currently classified under CTH 630 and 631 represents a unique *corpus* of documents which casts light on a hitherto little investigated aspect of Hittite religious belief. The preserved texts, whose oldest exemplars date to the Old Hittite period, describe the celebration of particular festivals and rites aimed at exorcising the religious fear caused by the thunder² and to protect the king from the potential danger perceived in the phenomenon, interpreted as a direct expression of the wrath of the Storm God. With the exception of Neu’s publication of KBo 17.74+ in 1970³, no text belonging to this corpus has ever been the object of a comprehensive edition. In this article I intend to address the problem concerning the nature of the ceremonies described in the texts, arguing that they are not to be considered as casuistic rites performed occasionally, but as regular ceremonies which were celebrated at a specific time of the year, like many other seasonal festivals attested in Hittite documentation.

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1 This paper presents some general results of my dissertation, discussed at the University of Florence in April 2014. The work has been published in 2017 with the title “Le feste ittite del tuono. Edizione critica di CTH 631” (Studia Asiana 12). I am very grateful to prof. Giulia Torri for reading a previous draft of this paper and for her invaluable remarks and observations. Any errors or mistakes are mine and mine alone. The abbreviations used follow those of the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary*.

2 On this aspect see the interesting considerations by Oettinger, 2001: 453-454.

3 Neu, 1970.

The text corpus

Besides many fragments which are assigned to the same text group but cannot be placed with certainty due to their fragmentary conditions, five main compositions can be detected in CTH 631.⁴

The oldest text of the *corpus*, KBo 17.11+⁵, and its duplicate, KBo 17.74+, have a typical Old Hittite script⁶. The document, as already observed by Wilhelm⁷, shows the distinct features of a *Sammeltafel*, a compilation tablet where the descriptions of two different festivals related to thunder are collected⁸. Between them, a short redactional insert of only five lines seems to describe the actions the king has to perform if a sudden clap of thunder at the end of the day makes a prosecution of the rite necessary.

Two other compositions, KBo 17.75 and KBo 20.61+⁹, can be dated to a later phase. A close examination of the ductus¹⁰ shows paleographic features which have generally been considered as typical of the Middle Hittite script¹¹. Both texts are divided by single or double paragraph lines into different sections and have hitherto been considered, as KBo 17.74+ // KBo 17.11+, compilation tablets, collecting several thunder festivals. However, some features, which I have described elsewhere¹², could represent the attempt to adapt a standard ritual practice to an unpredictable event such as thunder. The different sections in which the tablets are divided seem to record, rather than entirely different festival descriptions, the modifications that the thunder festival has to undergo in relation to the atmospheric condition. If so, they would not represent ordinary *Sammeltafeln* but a very unusual typology of scribal products, which has no parallel in Hittite documentation.

4 All texts are now published in Barsacchi, 2017.

5 Published in transcription by Neu, 1980: 5-11.

6 *Contra* Neu, 1970: 6-7, who considers KBo 17.74+ a MS composition. See Barsacchi 2017: 26-28. Cf. also Neu - Rüster, 1973: 235.

7 Wilhelm, 1992: 383-384.

8 On Hittite *Sammeltafeln*, see Hutter, 2011: 115-128, with previous literature.

9 On which see also Goedegebuure, 2017: 105-107.

10 See Barsacchi, 2014: 165-167; 209-210.

11 On the difficulties in the definition of the Middle Hittite script see the considerations by Popko, 2007: 575-581; van den Hout, 2009: 21-35; Weeden, 2011: 46-49, all with further literature.

12 See Barsacchi, 2015: 38-40.

KBo 20.61+, in particular, is the only text of this group that explicitly refers, at the end of the description of the first day, to the celebration of a “thunder festival”, EZEN₄ *tetḫešnaš*, in ll. obv. II 8-9: [...] *lukkattama* EZEN₄ *tetḫešnaš* / [*iyanzi* (?)] (...) ¹³, “the following day [they perform (?)] the festival of thunder (...)”. I believe that this reference alludes to the standard articulation of the thunder festival, whose complete description, however, is not present on the tablet, where only the incipit of the ceremony and the eventual modifications to the original sequence of rites prescribed for each day of the festival are recorded.

VSNF 12.10, another Middle Hittite tablet, clearly belongs to the same typology of texts but the broken conditions of the document prevent us from understanding whether it shares this particular structure or not.

All the texts, designated in the preserved colophons ¹⁴ simply as “tablets of the thunder”, DUB *tetḫešnaš*, begin with the description of the location and the particular action carried out by the king at the moment of the thunderclap, and describe the rites that have to be performed in order to deal with the new situation determined by the occurrence of the thunder, a situation perceived as potentially dangerous for the holiness of the king.

This character of unpredictability of the rites is particularly evident in the composition whose fragments are currently listed under CTH 630. The preserved colophons generally refer to the composition as follows: DUB x EZEN₄ ^DEN.ZU EZEN₄ *tetḫuwaša kuwapi anda imiyattari*, “tablet x of the festival of the moon and of the festival of thunder, when they are performed jointly” ¹⁵. It is a specific, three-days long, thunder festival, which originates from the superimposition of the structure of the thunder festival onto an ongoing ceremony, designated in the incipit of the text as “festival of the moon-god”, EZEN₄ ^DEN.ZU, necessitated by the sudden emergence of thunder during its celebration.

13 See also KBo 20.61+, rev. III 4.

14 Cf. KBo 17.74+, rev. IV 43'; KBo 17.75, rev. IV 57'; KBo 17.77 (which I believe is the colophon of KBo 20.61+), rev. IV x+1'.

15 KUB 32.135, rev. IV 59'-60'; KBo 25.178, rev. IV 20'-22'; KBo 23.64 rev. III 39'-41'.

The fragments of the composition show either a Middle or a Late Hittite script, but the close affinity with the documents of CTH 631, already attested in the Old Hittite period, and the Hattian background of the divine lists mentioned in two texts of the *corpus*¹⁶ seem to point to an Old Hittite tradition. As can be observed from the few preserved colophons, the festival seems to be collected on two different tablet series: one organized according to the number of the tablets and one organized according to the festival days¹⁷.

The external sources

While styled as substitute CASUISTIC with OCCASIONAL rituals, thunder festivals were assigned a specific calendrical setting. Several external sources record the importance of these ceremonies in Hittite cult and their celebration both at a local level and in what is generally defined as “state cult”. In particular, two types of documents, the so-called “cult inventories”¹⁸ and the oracular reports relating to the cultic duties of the king currently filed as CTH 563 and 564, prove to be particularly meaningful. From these sources, thunder festivals appear as seasonal ceremonies, performed every year at a specific time, which I believe can be identified with the beginning of the spring season, the moment of transition between the old and the new year in the Hittite calendar.

The cult inventory KUB 42.105+ (CTH 525)¹⁹ reports information about the development of the two major yearly celebrations in the Hittite calendar, the spring and the autumn festivals²⁰, in a series of cities, mentioning for each of them the amount of offerings prescribed and the main deities involved. In the fourth column of the reverse, the celebration of a “thunder festival” is mentioned as well. The broken condition of this part of the tablet prevents us from identifying the name of the city where the festival is performed.

16 On this divine list see Laroche, 1973: 83-89.

17 The same thing was observed by Singer, 1983: 38-48, with regard to the Old Hittite KILAM festival.

18 On this text group see Carter, 1962; Hazenbos, 2003; Cammarosano, 2012a, all with previous literature.

19 Most recently treated by Cammarosano, 2012a: 398-407.

20 On which see Archi, 1973: 7-27.

4' [A-NA EZEN₄ t]e-et-^hhe-eš^h-[na]-^haš 2 UDU 2 DUG KA.GAG ZÌ.D[A

5' [x UP-NU A]R-^hSÁ^h-AN-NU 1 wa-^hak^h-šur GA 1 tar-na-aš [Ì.NUN]

6' [ŠU.NIGIN] 4'UDU 5 PA ZÌ.DA 4 DUG KA.GAG.A A-NA [

7' [x na-a^h]-^hha-ši-iš Ì.NUN MU-ti me-^he^h-[ni

(4'-7') “[For the festival] of [th]un[d]er: 2 sheeps, 2 vessels of KA.GAG beer, fl[our...x UPNU] of barley porridge, 1 *wakšur* of milk, 1 *tarna-* of [butter...].

[Total]: 4 sheeps, 5 *PARĪSU* of flour, 4 vessels of KA.GAG.A beer for [...], [x *na^h*]*haši* of butter over the cou[rse] of the year [...].”

In KUB 38.12 (CTH 517), a text relating to the cult of the city of Karahna, a festival of thunder is mentioned two times among the celebrations to be performed in the course of the year for the Storm God of Liḫzina and the divine couple: Storm God - Sun Goddess of Arinna. In the first occurrence, the thunder festival is associated with another yearly event with a clear seasonal character, the summer festival.

obv. II

6 DU^{URU} Li-iḫ-zi-na DINGIR^{LIM}-tar ki-nu-un EGIR-pa DÙ-ir

7 É.DINGIR^{LIM}-ši ú-e-te-ir EZEN₄^{MEŠ} GIŠ^{!HUR} gaš-tar-ḫa-i-da

8 tar-ra-u-wa-an 2 EZEN₄^{MEŠ}-ši MU-aš me-ia-na-aš

9 ŠÀ 1 EZEN₄ te-et-^hhe-eš-na-aš 1 EZEN₄^{GIŠ}BURU₁₄ (...)

(...)

12 DU AN^E DUTU^{URU} PÚ-na KÙ.BABBAR GUŠKIN kap-pu-u-wa-an

(...)

22 EZEN₄^{MEŠ} GIŠ^{HUR} gaš-tar-ḫa-^hta^h tar-ra-u-wa-an

23 NINDA.GUR₄.RA UD^{KAM}-ši EZEN₄ ITU^{KAM} e-eš-zi 1 EZEN₄ te-e[^ht-^hhe-eš-na-aš]

24 [M]U-^haš me^h-ia-na-aš (...)

(6-9) “Storm God of Liḫzina: now they have remade the divine image (and) for him they have built a temple. The festivals are established according to the wooden tablet *gaštarḫaita*²¹: 2 festivals for him over the course of the year, whereof a festival of thunder (and) a festival of the summer (...).

(12) Storm God of Heaven, Sun-goddess of Arinna: silver (and) gold have been registered (...).

(22-24) The festivals are established according to the wooden tablet *gaštarḫaita*: for him there is a daily bread, a monthly festival and a festival of thun[der] over the course of the year (...).”

In KUB 56.56, listed under CTH 670 among the fragments of festivals but certainly to be identified with a cult inventory connected to the city of Ḫurma²², the festival of thunder is mentioned in the group of ceremonies performed for the deities of Zippalanda, together with the festival EN.NU.WA.ŠU, an obscure logographic construction not yet interpreted.

rev. IV

5 (...) 27 PA ZÌ.DA 14 DUG KA.GAG 21 DUG [
 6 1 PA AR-SÁ-AN-NU 1 GA.KIN.AG LÚ^{MES} É.GAL^{URU} Ḫur-ma p[é-eš-kán-zi]
 7 4 [DU]G ta-wa-al ki-nu-na-aš NU.GÁL nu GEŠTIN kar-ša-an-[zi]
 8 A-NA NINDA.GUR₄.RAUD^{KAM}-mi EZEN₄ ITU^{KAM} A-NA 2 EZEN₄^{MES}-ia [
 9 ŠÀ 1 EZEN₄ te-et-ḫe-eš-na-aš 1 EZEN₄ EN.NU.WA.ŠU^{DU}^{URU} Z[i-ip-pa-la-an-da]
 10 ^DAn-zi-li²³ ^DḪa/ur-ša-aš-wa ^{ḪUR.SAG}Da-a-ḫa ^DU.GUR-ia [

(5-10) “ The employees of the palace of Ḫurma provi[de]: 27 *PARĪSU* of flour, 14 vessels of KA.GAG beer, 21 vessels of [...]. 1 *PARĪSU* of barley porridge (and) a cheese [...] 4 vessels of *tawal* beer: now (this is) not (there) and they neglect the wine. For the daily bread and the monthly festival, and for two festivals, whereof a festival of thunder

21 On this term, whose meaning remains unknown, see the considerations by Cammarosano, 2012a: 419, with n. 852.

22 Cf. Pecchioli Daddi - Baldi, 2004: 495-506.

23 ^DAn-zi-li-iš in the autography.

and a festival EN.NU.WA.ŠU, for the Storm God of Z[ippalanda], Anzili, Ța/uršašwa, the mountain DaȚa and U.GUR [...].”

A thunder festival for the Storm God of Zippalanda is also mentioned, although in broken context, in the first column of the obverse of the tablet KUB 55.1 (CTH 581/CTH 574) a document collecting negligences towards a series of cultic duties²⁴.

21' [Š]A^{DU URU} Zi-ip-la-an-[da wa-aš-ku-uš

22' EZEN₄ ITU-wa ŠA ITU 3^{KAM}

23' ŠA GEŠTIN ŠA x[

24' ki-nu-un-^{ma}-wa x[

25' A-NA EZEN₄ te-et-ĥ[e-eš-na-aš

26' ki-nu-un-^{ma}-wa ke-^e-[da-ni

(21-26) “[Negligence] concerning the Storm God of Zippalanda: the monthly festival of the third month [...] of the wine, of [...]. Now instead [...] for the festival [of] thun[der...]. Now instead to thi[s?...]”

In the fourth column of the same tablet, a festival of thunder is mentioned in the group of ceremonies for the mountain DaȚa, the holy mountain of Zippalanda, immediately before the festival of the year. The indication that the performance of these ceremonies has been neglected for two years seems to confirm the yearly character of the thunder festival. In the following paragraph, the same ceremony seems to be performed for the holy mountain Puškurunuwa. Immediately before, a “great festival” is mentioned as well.

24 Transcribed by Groddek, 2002: 1-5. See also Popko, 1994: 302-303 (for ll. obv. I, 21'-28' and rev. IV, 13-15).

- 13 A-NA^{HURSAG} Da-a-ḥa^{URU} Ša-[˘]an-ti[˘]-wa-ra IŠ-TU ŠUM^PUTU^{ŠI} EZE[N₄ ITU]
 14 ŠA ITU 12^{KAM} EZEN₄ GURUN EZEN₄ te-et-ḥ[e-eš-n]a-aš EZEN₄ MU-ti EZEN₄ NA⁴ZI.[KIN
 15 kat-ta-an ḥa-ma-an-kán ki-nu-na ka-[a-a]š MU 2^{KAM} ku-it-ta-at UL e-[eš-ša-an-zi]
 16 [x x x (x) Pù]š-ku-ru-nu-wa EZEN₄.[˘]GAL[˘] [
 17 [x x EZEN₄ te-e]t-ḥe-eš-na-aš 2 UDU x[

(13-15) “For the mountain Daḥa to the city of Šantiwara, at the wish of my Majesty, are imposed: the [monthly] festi[val] of the twelfth month, the festival of the fruit, the festival of thunder, the festival of the year, the festival of the ste[le]. Now this is (already) the second year. Why don’t they [do] it?”

(16-17) [...] Puškurunuwa the great festival [...]festival] of thunder 2 sheeps [...].”

The festival of the thunder is mentioned twice also in the text KUB 53.21 (CTH 678)²⁵, although it is not certain whether it belongs to the corpus of cult inventories or not. On the reverse of the tablet, a sequence of festivals performed in Nerik for several deities is recorded. The celebration of a thunder festival is prescribed, together with a “festival in the autumn”, EZEN₄ zeni, for the Sun God of the Heaven in this case, the usual writing EZEN₄ tethesnas has been replaced by the equivalent logographic writing EZEN₄ BÚN. More logically, the celebration of a festival of the thunder for the Storm God of Nerik is prescribed in line rev. 10⁷.

- 2⁷ [x x x x (x)]x-aš-ši ḥar-pi-ia-aš EZEN₄ x[
 3⁷ [x (x) ^DUTU ^U]RU[˘] A[˘]-ri-in-na EZEN₄ BURU₁₄ EZEN₄ z[é-na-aš-ša]
 4⁷ [x x (x)]^DUTU AN^E EZEN₄ BÚN EZEN₄ zé-ni [
 5⁷ [^{URU}N]e-ri-ik-ka₄ ^DKAL EZEN₄ BURU₁₄ EZEN₄ zé-na-aš-ša
 6⁷ ^{URU}Ne-ri-ik-ka₄ ^DTe-li-pi-nu Û A-NA ^DḤa-a-ša-me-l[i]
 7⁷ [EZ]EN₄ BURU₁₄ EZEN₄ zé-na-aš-ša

25 Edited by Haas, 1970: 309-310.

- 8' ^{URU}Ne-ri-ik-ka₄ li-la-an ku-wa-pí KÙ-an-zi nu A-NA ^{DM}[AḪ]
 9' ^{NA4}ZI.KIN li-la-aš-ša-al-la ku-wa-pí nu A-NA ^{DM}[AḪ]
 10' ^{DU} ^{URU}Ne-ri-ik EZEN₄ te-et-ḫe-eš-^{na}-[aš] ^{A-NA} ^D' [

(2'-7') “[...] *ḫarpiyaš*, festival [...]. [... Sun Goddess of] Arinna: festival of the summer, festival [of the autumn]. [...] Sun God of Heaven (?): festival of thunder, festival in autumn. In Nerik (for) ^DKAL: festival of the summer, festival of the autumn. In Nerik (for) Telipinu and Ḫašamili: festival of the summer, festival of the autumn.

(8'-10') When they celebrate the conciliation in Nerik for DINGIR.MAḪ and (by) the stele of conciliation for DINGIR.M[AḪ...]. Storm God of Nerik: festival of thunder. For [...].”

This brief list is completed by a small fragment from Kušakli/Sarissa, KuSA I. 1/4 (CTH 530)²⁶, where in the same paragraph the “daily bread”, the monthly festival and some yearly festivals are mentioned together with a thunder festival, expressed also in this case by the logographic writing EZEN₄ BÚN.

The summary character of the inventory tablets, imposed by the very nature of this textual typology, prevents us from identifying elements which could clarify the nature of the festivals related to thunder, and how they were performed. Still, some data can be inferred. These festivals appear as regular ceremonies, which are performed in several local religious centres on an annual basis, generally as a part of the cult due to a particular deity. Like other local festivals, they are directly related to local habits and beliefs, and inserted in cult calendars largely modelled on natural and agricultural cycles.

At the same time, however, unlike many other festivals mentioned in the cult inventories, thunder festivals survive also in detailed descriptions, represented by the particular typology of compositions collected in CTH 631, whose character I have tried to delineate above.

26 Edited by Hazenbos, 2003: 155-156.

These documents, copied and preserved from the Old Hittite period in the archives of Ḫattuša, clearly indicate that the thunder festivals were also part of what is generally called the Hittite “state cult”. Maybe originally local festivals, performed at a certain period of the year in order to appease the angry Storm God, thunder ceremonies became official festivals, performed by the king and his entourage in order to prevent the potential negative effects perceived in thunder and to exorcize the religious fear caused by the phenomenon. It is certainly to this official sphere of Hittite worship that the festival of the thunder mentioned in the fourth paragraph of the Instructions for the temple personnel CTH 264 must be assigned:

KUB 13.4, obv. I

39 [an-da-m]a EZEN₄ ITU^{KAM} EZEN₄ MU^{TI} EZEN₄ A-IA-LI EZEN₄ z[é-na-a]n-da-aš
 40 EZEN₄ ḫa-me-eš-ḫa-an-da-aš EZEN₄ te-et-ḫe-eš-na-aš EZEN₄ ḫi-ia-r[a]-aš
 41 EZEN₄ pu-u-da-ḫa-aš EZEN₄ i-šū-wa-aš EZEN₄ ša-at-la-aš-ša-aš
 42 EZEN₄ BI-IB-RI EZEN₄^{MEŠ} šu-up-pa-ia-aš ^{LÚ}SANGA-aš
 43 EZEN₄^{MEŠ} LÚ^{MEŠ}ŠU.GI EZEN₄^{MEŠ} MUNUS^{MEŠ} AMA.DINGIR^{LIM} EZEN₄ da-ḫi-ia-aš
 44 EZEN₄^{MEŠ} LÚ^{MEŠ} ú-pa-ti-ia-aš EZEN₄^{MEŠ} pu-u-l[a]-aš EZEN₄^{MEŠ} ḫa-aḫ-ra-an-na -aš
 45 na-aš-ma-aš ku-iš im-ma ku-iš EZEN₄-aš ^{URU}ḫ[a-a]t-tu-ši-kán še-er
 46 na-aš ma-a-an IŠ-TU GU₄^{HLA} UDU^{HLA} NINDA KAŠ Û IŠ-TU GEŠTIN
 47 ḫu-u-ma-an-da-az ša-ra-a ti-ia-an-ta UL e-eš-ša-at-te-ni
 48 na-at pé-eš-kán-zi ku-i-e-eš nu-uš-ma-aš šu-me-eš LÚ^{MEŠ} É.DINGIR^{LIM}
 49 ḫa-ap-pár da-aš-kat-te-ni DINGIR^{MEŠ}-aš-ma-at-kán ZI-ni wa-ak-ši-ia-nu-ut-te-ni

(39-49) “Fur[ther]more: the festival of the month, the festival of the year, the festival of the stag, the fall festival, the [fe]stival of the spring, the thunder festival, the [fe]stival of *ḫiyara*, the festival of *pudaḫa*, the festival of *ḫišuwa*, the festival of *[ša]tlašša*, the festival of the *rhyton*, the festivals of the sacred SANGA-[priest], the festivals of the old men, the festivals of the AMA.DINGIR priestesses, the festival of *daḫiya*-, the festivals of the *upati*-men, the festivals of the lot, the festivals of *ḫahratar*, or whatever festival (there is) up in Ḫattuša, if you do not celebrate them along with all cattle, sheep, bread, beer and wine set up

(for the gods), but (from) those (people) giving it (the offerings), you - Temple-men -from them you'll keep taking payment, you will cause them (the offerings) to fall short off the will of the gods.”²⁷

The thunder festival is mentioned as part of a group of eighteen festivals that the religious functionaries of the central administration in Ḫattuša have to perform in the course of the year. As correctly observed by A. Taggar-Cohen²⁸, the list is conceived with a rational method: it mentions first the seasonal festivals of old Anatolian tradition, such as the festivals of the month and of the year, and then ceremonies such as the *hiyara*, the *pudaḫa* and the *hišuwa* festivals, whose presence must be considered a direct reflex of the religious politics of the royal court at the time of the redaction of the text, largely influenced by Hurrian religious notions. The festival of thunder, mentioned immediately after the spring festival, can confidently be assigned to the first group²⁹.

It is very likely that the local thunder festivals mentioned in the cult inventories differed in many aspects from the official ceremony performed in Ḫattuša. The shift from a traditional rite, related to local habits and cults, to an official one, performed in the capital at the presence of the royal court, certainly implied a certain degree of modification in the ceremony and its structure. The main purpose itself of the official rite, aimed at the ritual protection of the king, was clearly different from the one attributed to the ceremony at a local level.

The festivals of thunder and the Hittite cult calendar

As recently suggested by Cammarosano³⁰, the order and position of the festivals mentioned in the cult inventories seem to reflect a chronological succession, even though exceptions from the normal sequence are attested³¹.

27 English translation by Taggar-Cohen, 2006: 53-54. Cf. Süel, 1985: 26-29.

28 Taggar-Cohen, 2006: 122.

29 Pace Taracha, 2009: 137, according to whom: “Some of these festivals belonged to the old tradition, while the festivals of thunder, *hiyara*, *pudaḫa* and *šatlašša* were celebrated for Teššub of Ḫalab and deities from his circle”.

30 Cammarosano, 2012a: 181-182.

31 Cammarosano, 2012a: 169; *id.*, 2012b: 18, n. 39.

The festivals, in other words, seem to have been listed rationally and grouped according to their calendrical setting. A regular structure can thus be identified, with the autumn festivals generally preceding those of the spring and these followed by the ceremonies connected with the agricultural activities of the summer³². In KUB 38.12 the festival of thunder precedes the summer festival, EZEN₄BURU₁₂, lit. “festival of the summer/harvest”, a logographic expression which could also refer to the spring festival³³. In KUB 53.21 it is followed by the autumn festival, like the several festivals of the summer performed for the different deities of Nerik and mentioned in the same passage. The reversed order, with the summer (or spring) festivals preceding that of the autumn, could reflect here the order of their performance starting from the beginning of the year rather than the traditional seasonal sequence by which the festivals are listed in the inventory tablets.

In the Instruction text KUB 13.4, a thunder festival is mentioned immediately after the autumn and the spring festivals and it is grouped together with other ceremonies, such as the *hiyara*- festival, whose celebration was almost certainly carried out in the spring³⁴.

A close correlation between thunder festivals and the spring season is further suggested by the fact that the Hittites explicitly connected the celebration of the festivals of the spring with the acoustic perception of thunder.

The description of the spring festival in the inventory texts is generally introduced by the standard formula: GIM-an DIŠI / *ḥamešḥanza DÜ-ri tethai* ^{DUG}*ḥarši gēnuanzi* (e.g. KBo 2.7, obv. 9', rev. 16 *passim*), “When the spring comes (and) it thunders, they open the *ḥarši* vessel”.

32 The fact that the autumn festival always precedes the spring festival seems to contradict the chronological order of their performance, considering that the Hittite year began in spring. This has been explained by Hazenbos, 2003: 169, as the reflex of an ancient agricultural calendar where the beginning of the year was placed in autumn. Cf. Haas, 1994: 693. Cammarosano, 2012a: 181, suggests also that the sequence could reflect the logical priority of the action of filling the *ḥarši*- vessel with the harvest, typical of the autumn festival, on the ritual opening of the vessel which characterized the spring festival. On these ritual actions see Archi, 1973: 14-18.

33 Cf. Cammarosano, 2012b: 18, n. 39.

34 See Haas, 1994: 556. Cf. also n. 113. The *hiyara*- festival, in particular, was probably performed in the months of April or May, if the derivation from the Akkadian term *ayyāri*, which designated a spring month in many west-Semitic calendars, is correct. Cf. HED 3: 304. On this festival see Hutter, 2002: 187-196, with further literature. Cf. also Taggar-Cohen, 2006: 96. See also the critical considerations by Trémouille, 1997: 101-102, based on the fact that, in KBo 14.142, obv. II, 34 (CTH 698), the festival seems to take place in the 10th month, i.e. in winter period.

This clause can be found in slightly different forms, such as: *GIM-an=ma DI₁₂-ŠI DÛ-ri tethīman ištamaššanzi*, “when the spring comes (and) they hear the thunder”, attested in KUB 17.35, II 12’, or, more simply: *GIM-an=ma ḥamišḫi DÛ-ri tethai*, “when in spring it thunders” (KUB 25.23+ obv. I 8’)³⁵.

Even today on the Anatolian plateau the spring season, whose beginning can be placed between the end of the month of March and the beginning of April, is characterized by heavy rainfalls³⁶.

Given the impossibility of confining a meteorological phenomenon such as thunder to an exact chronological timeframe, it is very likely that the starting moment of the spring festivals was marked by a certain degree of flexibility, and a geographical variation dependent on the climatic situation must certainly be assumed as well.

The association between the thunderstorm and the beginning of the spring season which emerges from the cult inventories makes it likely that the meteorological ceremonies connected to thunder and defined in the sources as *EZEN₄ tethēšnaš/BÛN* were celebrated in the same period of the year³⁷.

The transition between winter and spring coincides with the beginning of the Hittite year. This seems to be confirmed by the often-quoted passage KUB 38.32, obv. 3 (CTH 508): *GIM-an zēnaš kišari ANA MU^{KAM}-ti ITU 8^{KAM}*, “(...) when it becomes autumn, in the eight month of the year”. If we calculate, with Hoffner³⁸, the approximate length of the Hittite autumn in two months, the current months of November and December, the text would place the beginning of the Hittite year between the end of March and the beginning of April, which coincides perfectly with the beginning of the spring period³⁹.

35 On the grammatical form *ḥamišḫi DÛ-ri tethai* see the considerations by Cammarosano, 2012a: 234, with previous literature.

36 Hoffner Jr., 1974: 18, 22, with further references.

37 See also Taggar-Cohen, 2006: 119.

38 Hoffner Jr., 1974: 42.

39 The same date can be inferred from KUB 20.25, a text dealing with the cult of Zippalanda, where the twelfth (and last) month of the year is explicitly located in winter. Cf. Popko, 1994: 309.

In the ten year Annals of the king Muršili the second (KBo 3.4 + KUB 23.125, obv. II 48)⁴⁰ the celebration of a festival of the year is mentioned at the end of the campaign of the third year, and thus in winter period, when all military activities are suspended. In the next paragraph, the description of the events of the following year is introduced by the phrase: “when the spring comes”. Later on, Muršili claims to have waged battle against the city of Puranta: “when I finished celebrating the festival of the year” (KBo 3.4 + KUB 23.125, obv. II 57).

The exact meaning of the expression $EZEN_4 MU^{KAM}$, is not clear but, in such contexts⁴¹, it probably refers to the particular ceremony, or ensemble of ceremonies, which marked the passage from the old to the new year, and was an important part both of the official cult calendar and of the local religious traditions reflected in the inventory texts. It must not be confused with ceremonies like the *purulli* festival, whose calendrical setting is still far from ascertained⁴², or the cult of the Year performed in the *hešta*- house on the eleventh day of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM festival⁴³, whose celebration took place at a later time of the spring, as confirmed by the oracular report KUB 18.12+⁴⁴.

Whether the time of celebration of the $EZEN_4 MU$ was clearly established on an astronomical basis (e.g. the solar equinox⁴⁵), or depended on a rather fluctuant seasonal event, such as the thunderstorms which marked the beginning of the spring season, is hard to establish. The spring thunders certainly represented an important marker of time, as confirmed by the introductory formula which opens the description of the spring festivals in

40 See Del Monte, 1993: 65.

41 In other contexts the expression $EZEN_4 MU$ certainly must not be understood as referring to a particular ceremony, but rather as “yearly festival”, i.e. as a general indication for a festival performed once in a year. Cf. the prayer of Arnuwanda and Ašmunikkal CTH 375: UD-aš ITU-aš MU-ti meyaniyaš SÍSKUR^{III A} EZEN^{III A}₄, “daily, monthly and annual rites and festivals” (KUB 17.21, obv. I 21’-22’; rev. III 14’-15’ with duplicates). See the translation by Singer, 2002: 42-43.

42 Pace Haas, 1994: 696ff., who identifies it with the Hittite New Year festival and believes it was initially celebrated in autumn, before being integrated, at least in part, in the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM festival from the time of Muršili II. Thus also Hutter, 1997: 81-82. Cf. now, on the *purulli* festival and its relationship with the cult of Lelwani performed in the *hešta*- house, Torri, 2015: 296-298.

43 On which see Torri, 1999: 21-29; *id.*, 2015: 295-296.

44 See below.

45 See Haas, 1994: 693 with n. 142.

the cult inventories, as well as by the fact that some sources correlate the thunder festivals and the festival of the year.

This is the case of two oracular texts, KUB 5.4+KUB 18.53 (CTH 563) and KUB 18.12+KUB 22.15 (CTH 564), where omens concerning the place where the Hittite king will spend the winter period and the cultic duties which he, together with the queen, will have to perform, are collected. The documents, very similar in their structure, follow the pattern of Hittite oracular praxis, proceeding through consecutive questions, to which a positive or negative answer is given⁴⁶. The two passages read as follows:

KUB 5.4 + KUB 18.53, obv. I

- 16 [D]UTU^{ŠI} *ke-e-da-ni* MU-ti I-NA URU^{URU}Ḫat-ti SÈD i-ia-zi
 17 [nu-z]a EZEN₄^{MEŠ} SAG.UŠ EZEN₄ MU-ti EZEN₄ BÚN-na-aš I-NA
 URU^{URU}Ḫat-ti DÙ-zi

(16-17) “My Majesty in this year will spend the winter in Ḫattuša and he will celebrate in Ḫattuša the regular festivals, (i.e.) the festival of the year, the festival of thunder”.

KUB 18.12 + KUB 22.15, obv. I

- 1 [ma-a]-an-kán DUTU^{ŠI} *la-aḫ-ḫa-az* UGU ú-iz-zi nu-za DINGIR^{MEŠ}
 DÙ-zi ŠÈ₁₂-an-zi-ma DUTU^{ŠI} MUNUS.LUGAL URU^{URU}KÙ.BABBAR-ši
 2 ŠA^{DU} URU^{URU}Ḫa-la-ab EZEN₄ *te-et-ḫe-eš-na-aš-za a-pí-ia* DÙ-an-zi
 EZEN MU-ti-za a-pí-ia DÙ-an-zi
 3 MUŠEN^{HIA} *mi-ia-na-aš-ši a-pí-ia ta-ru-up-pa-an-ta-ri* GIM-an-ma ŠA
 AN.TAḪ.ŠUM *me-ḫur ti-ia-zi nu-kán A-NA* DINGIR^{MEŠ}
 4 AN.TAḪ.ŠUM *ti-ia-an-zi* (...)

(1-2) “[Wh]en my Majesty comes up from the military campaign, he will celebrate the gods, and my Majesty and the queen will spend the

46 On these texts, see Archi, 1975: 122-123, 141.

winter in Ḫattuša. There they will celebrate the festival of thunder of the Storm God of Ḫalap, there they will celebrate the festival of the year, there the birds of the season will congregate for him, and when the time of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM comes, then they will place the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM for the gods (...). ”

In KUB 5.4 + KUB 18.53 the thunder festival and the festival of the year are defined as “regular festivals”. The exact definition of the expression EZEN₄.SAG.UŠ is still a much debated issue, whose solution is not without relevance for our comprehension of the Hittite cult calendar. Singer approached the problem focusing on the relationship between the expression EZEN₄.SAG.UŠ and the locution EZEN₄.GAL, the “great festival”, suggesting that with the term “regular”, SAG.UŠ, akk. *KAYYAMANŪ*, hitt. *ukturi-*, the Hittite scribes defined the standard version of a festival, performed on an annual basis at a fixed time⁴⁷.

According to this interpretation, the expression “great festival”, when referring to the same ceremony, would have been used to indicate a distinct version of it, perhaps more extended, to be celebrated only in certain years for particular occasions⁴⁸. Singer based this theory on the presence of both the “regular” and the “great” version of the KILAM festival and of the festival of the *hešta*-house in the shelf list KUB 30.68. His solution, although intriguing, does not take into account the presence of “great festivals” in Hittite cult inventories, such as in KUB 38.12 (CTH 517), where a great festival is mentioned among the ceremonies performed annually for the god ^DKAL in Karaḫna. We find mentions of an EZEN₄.GAL also in the fragments of cult inventories KBo 13.252⁴⁹ and KuSa I. 1/5⁵⁰ (both listed under CTH 530), where the term is even attested in the plural form (KuSa I. 1/5, obv. 4': [...] x EZEN₄^{MES} GAL [...]). This seems to me to contradict

47 Singer, 1983: 47-48.

48 Referring to the mentions, in the Annals of Muršili II, of “the festivals of the sixth year” at the end of the campaign of the 10th and 16th year (cf. Del Monte, 1993: 100-113), Singer, 1983: 94 (with n. 30) suggests that the “great festivals” were celebrated in a six-years cycle. However, Taracha, 2009: 70, n. 386 (with further literature), correctly points out that the great festival of Telipinu in Ḫanḫhana was celebrated every nine years, and that festivals “of the third year” are attested as well (e.g. KBo 13.231, rev.[?] 7': 1 'EZEN₄' ŠA MU 3^{KAM}. Cf. Hazenbos, 2003: 86-87).

49 Edited by Hazenbos, 2003: 109-11.

50 Edited by Hazenbos, 2003: 156-159.

Singer’s distinction between “regular festivals” performed annually and “great festivals” performed only in certain years. According to Del Monte⁵¹, the adjective *šalli-*, when applied to a festival, would indicate the local ceremonies which have become part of the larger AN.TAḪ.ŠUM^{SAR} and *nuntarriyašhaš* festivals, but this assumption remains extremely uncertain.

In the reports CTH 563 and CTH 564 the thunder festival and the festival of the year are mentioned as the most important cult activity that the king has to perform in the particular period of the year taken into account by the oracular investigation. In this sense their definition as “regular” festivals is no surprise, since their performance is not presented as an exceptional event but as a standard religious duty the king has to perform at a specific time of the year, a time characterized by recurrent thunderclaps and perceived as the moment of transition between winter and spring.

The expression SAG.UŠ probably refers to the festivals that had a fixed place in a cult calendar, connected with seasonal events or religious activities unvaryingly performed at particular times of the year⁵². As regards local cults, it is likely that every religious centre of the Hittite empire had its own regular festivals, which did not necessarily coincide with those performed elsewhere. Similarly, in the official cult, some religious ceremonies which did not have correspondence in the local cults, such as the KILAM festival and the festival performed in the *hešta-* house, assumed the character of EZEN₄ SAG.UŠ. The relationship between the regular and the great versions of the same festivals currently remains an open question.

Houwink ten Cate has seen a contradiction between the aforementioned oracular reports, which connect the celebration of the festival of the year and the festival of the thunder with the winter period, and the picture that emerges from the inventory tablets, where the thunder as a meteorological

51 Del Monte, 1993: 27-28.

52 With regard to the “regular festival” in the *hešta-* house mentioned in the Middle Hittite shelf list KBo 31.1+, obv. 8’, I tentatively suggest that this expression could refer to the rites connected with the new year performed in the *hešta-* house during the 11th day of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM festival (whose main core was already formed by the time of Šuppiluliuma I), which has a seasonal character and a precise calendrical setting. This part of the great spring festival was created on the basis of an old tradition of rites devoted to the goddess Lelwani and her circle and performed in the *hešta* house, a tradition represented by KBo 17. 15 and its later manuscripts. Cf. Torri, 2013: 289-296.

phenomenon is clearly associated with the spring⁵³. According to the scholar, this is no surprise, since “a festival of Thundering in a cult calendar is a *contradictio in terminis*. It inevitably was an ad hoc religious festival”⁵⁴. A certain character of uncertainty in the definition of the exact moment of celebration of the thunder festivals is certainly undeniable, given the fact that they are closely related to an unpredictable meteorological event. Nonetheless, I find it hard to see a contradiction between the situation presented in the cult inventories and the one described in CTH 563 and 564. Far from proving the *ad hoc* character of the festivals related to thunder, they seem to me to confirm the fact that they took place at a precise time of the year, a time characterized by a strong religious meaning: the beginning of the spring season, which coincides with the transition from the old to the new year in Hittite calendar, as confirmed by the close association between the festival of thunder and the festival of the year, particularly evident in the oracular reports concerning the winter stay of the king, but observable also in some cult inventories (cf. KUB 55.1 rev. IV 14’).

The recurrent thunderclaps of this time of the year marked the beginning of the spring season. The festivals of thunder mentioned in the cult inventories could have been performed in occasion of the first thunders of the new season, immediately before the several ceremonies of the spring mentioned in the cult inventories as an important part of local cult calendars⁵⁵. As confirmed by the oracular report KUB 18.12+, the festival of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM plant, which incorporated several originally independent local cults, was celebrated at a later time with respect to the thunder festival and the festival of the year, whose celebration took place in the liminal period between the old and the new year.

Conclusion

Although thunder signaled the beginning of the spring season and the renewal of the agricultural cycle, and was therefore an essential and most welcome

53 Houwink ten Cate, 1992: 92.

54 *Ibidem*.

55 Thus also Taggar-Cohen, 2006: 119, according to whom: “(...) the thunder festival is the first among the festivals of the spring”.

marker of time in Hittite calendar, it remained, from a strictly religious point of view, a frightening manifestation of the Storm God’s anger, which demanded to be soothed by appropriate rites. This duplicity explains in my opinion the ambiguity of the festivals of thunder and lies at the basis of their celebration in the official Hittite cult. Their integration in the state cult already in the Old Hittite period is reflected by the existence of detailed festival descriptions represented by the tablets collected in CTH 630 and 631, while very few descriptions of local seasonal festivals mentioned in the cult inventories were preserved and copied in the archives of Ḫattuša.

The performance of thunder ceremonies at a specific time of the year does not conflict, in my opinion, with the character of unpredictability particularly evident in the incipit of the texts collected in CTH 630 and 631. As festival descriptions preserved in the Hittite archives, they represent the official part of this cult, performed by the king and the queen as part of their religious duties. Even if the celebrations were expected to take place at a specific time of the year, the exact moment of their beginning depended on the perception of the thunder, probably the first thunder of the new season (and thus of the year). Given the ominous value of such phenomenon, the development of the ceremony, aimed at the ritual protection of the king, could not but be influenced by the location and the action carried out by the king at the moment of the thunderclap. The double characterization of the thunder festivals, as ceremonies performed at a specific time of the year, and therefore inserted in a cult calendar, and as official rites constantly modified in relation to the atmospheric condition, makes the *corpus* of the thunder festivals collected in CTH 630 and 631 a unique body in Hittite religious documentation.

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