



# nîĝ-ba dub-sar maĥ

Studies on Ebla and the Ancient Near East  
presented to Amalia Catagnoti

Edited by  
Elisabetta Cianfanelli and Fiammetta Gori

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# Wilderness and Liminal Spaces in Hittite Religious Thought\*

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## 1. Introduction

The perception of natural wilderness<sup>1</sup> and its conceptualisation in the form of religious narratives, myths, rituals and cosmologies constitutes an essential aspect of the history of religions. The study of this notion, and of the role played by the wilderness in Hittite religion, however, still represents a rather uninvestigated topic.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of wilderness is closely connected with that of liminality. This concept was first formulated by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his study of transitional rites in ancient societies, *Rites de passage* (1909), and became known to a wider public in the late 1960s through the works of Victor W. Turner.<sup>3</sup> The term refers to the “interstructural situation” that, according to Turner, defines the intermediate phase between ritual separation and aggregation from and with a given social status. This moment of transition also has a spatial connotation, which van Gennep identifies with the particular meaning attributed to those marginal zones that historically separate territories, such as deserts, marshlands, forests and mountains. The wilderness, in this respect, has been interpreted as a “spatial version of liminality”.<sup>4</sup>

In the words of Jan Johannes Ahlrichs, Kai Riehle, and Nurzat Sultanalieva:<sup>5</sup>

The liminal place is an in-between place creating experiences of place, time and emotions that are inherently different from everyday reality. In other words, a liminal place is a place, where one experiences certain ambiguities in self/group alteration. Already the journey to these places, commonly known as procession and/or pilgrimage along sacred ways flanked by other sacred locations, liberates the initiates from social structures increasingly the closer they come to their aim (...). Liminality as an analytical tool to approach geographically remote areas is best understood as an operator with respect to actions and practices people exhibit near such ritual places. It serves as a support in-

\* It is my great pleasure to contribute with this short study to a volume in honour of Amalia Catagnoti, with whom I had the opportunity to study and collaborate during many fruitful years at the University of Florence.

<sup>1</sup> The term is used, following FELDT 2016, 351, to refer to the complex of “natural spatial domains of the world that are culturally understood as being largely free of human influence”. For a comprehensive overview of the concept of wilderness in mythology and religion, see FELDT 2012, with further literature.

<sup>2</sup> In recent years, important studies have been dedicated to the theme of sacred landscapes and the symbolic perception of natural spaces in ancient Anatolia. Here it will suffice to mention the collective volumes *Sacred Landscapes of Hittites and Luwians* (D’AGOSTINO – ORSI – TORRI 2015) and *Natur und Kult in Anatolien* (HUY – HENGELS – STEITLER 2019). For an analysis of the Hittite symbolic representation of landscape as reflected in the myth of Telepinu, see also DELLA CASA 2014. A comprehensive investigation of the concept of wilderness in Hittite religion, however, is still lacking. In Assyriological studies, the topic has aroused greater academic interest. See in particular FELDT 2016 on the construction of the concept of mountain wilderness in Mesopotamian religion, focusing on the literary elaboration of the topic in Old Babylonian Sumerian narrative. See also STEINKELLER 2007, VERDERAME 2011, and VERDERAME 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular TURNER 1967, TURNER 1969, and TURNER 1977.

<sup>4</sup> FELDT 2012, 9. On liminality in Hittite Anatolia, see ALAURA 2019, MOUTON 2013, and MOUTON 2014. Cf. also MOUTON 2018, in particular 31-33.

<sup>5</sup> See AHLRICHS – RIEHLE – SULTANALIEVA 2015, 208.

strument, which aids in the construction of a relationship of these places with the other, exposed through the spatial expression of rituals by the people at such places.

Against this background, the present paper aims to address, by analysing a few case studies, the understanding of wilderness in Hittite cult practice, focusing on some ritual activities that the texts describe as taking place in the open country.

## 2. Terminology

In his article dedicated to the dichotomy between city and landscape, “The City and the Country in Hatti”, Gary Beckman<sup>6</sup> pointed out how several terms indicating natural spaces that lie outside urban centres are attested in Hittite sources, and may be used to express the concept of wilderness. He mentions, in particular, the words *gimra-*, with its Akkadian equivalent *ṢĒRŪ* and the corresponding Sumerian word *LÍL*, and the Sumerograms *A.ŠÀ* and *ḪUR.SAG*. *gimra-* can be used to define both the cultivated areas located immediately outside the city and more remote, uninhabited places. *A.ŠÀ* is closely related in meaning to *gimra-*, and is often used in the Laws and in land donation documents in reference to specific plots of agricultural land. The term *ḪUR.SAG* is used already in Sumerian sources to indicate a distant mountain range, and it is the word that most clearly connotes what we define as “wilderness” also in Hittite documentation. Another word related to wilderness terminology that we can add to this list is the Sumerian *GIŠTIR*, which defines a forest, a wild and potentially dangerous place perceived as clearly separated from urban context. The term corresponds to the Hittite *GIŠtieššar*, and possibly also *GIŠwarhuizna*.<sup>7</sup>

However, it is in particular through the Hittite expression *dammel pedan* that the concept of wilderness in the sense of “natural otherness” is best conveyed.<sup>8</sup> The formula *dammel pedan* can be translated as “other place”, “outside place”, or, according to a more debated interpretation, “pure, intact place”. This translation in particular dates back to 1964, when Hans Gustav Güterbock, in one of his “Lexicographical Notes”,<sup>9</sup> provided a new interpretation of the adjective *dammeli-*, which had been previously understood as deriving from *damai-*, “other”, rejecting the etymological connection with *damai-* and interpreting the adjective as referring to an uninhabited, untouched territory, soon followed by the main dictionaries such as the *Hethitisches Etymologisches Glossar*<sup>10</sup> and the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary*.<sup>11</sup>

This translation has not been questioned until quite recently, when, taking up the issue in a dedicated article, Jaan Puhvel reintroduced the etymological connection with *damai-*, associating the expression *dammel pedan* with a broad semantic spectrum ranging from the meaning “second, other” to “different”, “outside”, “outer”, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

## 3. Wilderness as a liminal space

Regardless of the nuance of meaning that one can attribute to this expression, in particular contexts it clearly conveys the idea of a liminal space, a natural space that is remote, both spatially and conceptually, from the urban space, and charged with a particular sacred

<sup>6</sup> BECKMAN 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Following the interpretation by OETTINGER 2002, 253-260, according to whom *warhuizna-* refers to a “natural” forest while the term *tieššar* would be used to indicate an artificial forest, resulting from an original intentional tree planting, which would explain why the term is often associated with gardens and vineyards.

<sup>8</sup> See OETTINGER 2010, 117-119.

<sup>9</sup> GÜTERBOCK 1964, 103-105.

<sup>10</sup> HEG 3, T, D/1, 76, “frisch, unbearbeitet, von Menschenhand unberührt”.

<sup>11</sup> CHD, P, 339, “uncultivated place, uninhabited place, virgin land”.

<sup>12</sup> PUHVEL 2012, 83-86.

meaning. There is a variety of geographical places that the Hittite sources associate with the concept of wilderness and define as *dammel pedan*, the most frequent ones, given the character of Anatolian landscape, being forests and mountains. An interesting document, KUB 17.28+, the fifth composition recorded on a very particular *Sammeltafel* collecting several rituals, CTH 730,<sup>13</sup> describes the ritual activities to be performed *mān* <sup>D</sup>SÎN *šakiyazi* “when the moon gives a sign” (= eclipses?). This moment, clearly marked by a strong religious significance, is associated with rites performed at particular places, which the text describes as being located in the “otherness”, respectively in an “outer place or in a forest”.

KUB 17.28, iii

36 (...) <sup>GI</sup>ZA.LAM.GAR<sup>HI.A</sup> *ma-a-an*

37 *dam-mi-li pé-di ma-a-an-kán* <sup>GI</sup>TIR-iš-ni

38 *an-da tar-na-an-zi*

They set up the ZA.LAM.GAR structure<sup>14</sup> in an outer/uncultivated place or in a forest

In the Hittite religious worldview, natural spaces such as mountains and forests, considered to be the seat of particular categories of deities, are perceived as deeply significant places that can connect the human with the divine realm.<sup>15</sup> The unifying feature of such places is their remoteness and the fact that they are never permanently inhabited, which points to a social and spatial estrangement of these places from every form of structured life.

The fundamental element to take into consideration is the perception of a clear separation between the urban space and external space, a separation that is charged with a profound religious meaning. As in Mesopotamia,<sup>16</sup> so in Anatolia the city is perceived as the place of order, guaranteed by the presence of the gods in the city sanctuaries. Moving away from the city means entering a different and potentially dangerous dimension, where the rules of urban order are absent, and the categories of human and the divine become blurred.

Such a clear distinction between the city and the external space emerges clearly from a fragmentary passage of tablet KUB 31.113 (CTH 275),<sup>17</sup> an instruction text for priests and diviners perhaps datable to the age of Hattušili III, where it is specified not to use water coming from the immediate vicinity of the settlement for the rituals, but to fetch it from the *gauriya*-forest and the *dunnariya*-forest. The exact meaning of these terms unfortunately remains elusive,<sup>18</sup> but what emerges clearly is the fact that the water for the rites must be pure, and therefore has to be taken from well-defined natural environments, which are external to the urban space, and therefore separated from any type of potentially contaminating activity.<sup>19</sup>

It is in particular in relation to the concepts of impurity and contagion,<sup>20</sup> indeed, that the wilderness takes on its particular religious significance. Defining the space of human life, the city would not tolerate any form of ritual impurity in its midst, and demanded that specific ritual precautions should be taken to keep the city safe from possibly polluting ritual activities. Uncultivated areas outside of urban settlements were therefore used as a venue for specific cleansing rites, where the patient’s removal from the social context, and his final reinstatement, reflects the condition of liminality associated with his condition of impurity.

<sup>13</sup> The *Sammeltafel* is partially published by TORRI 2004 (CTH 458), and Francesco Fuscagni, [hethiter.net/](http://hethiter.net/): CTH 426.2 (INTR 2016-10-19).

<sup>14</sup> According to MOUTON 2015a, 82, fn. 9, the Sumerogram ZA.LAM.GAR in Hittite texts can identify both a fabric construction such as a tent and a light wooden structure such as a hut. For the use of similar open-air structures in Hittite documentation, see also TARACHA 2001.

<sup>15</sup> See BECKMAN 2013, 155-157.

<sup>16</sup> See VERDERAME 2011 and VERDERAME 2020, 88-90.

<sup>17</sup> Published by MILLER 2013, 276-279.

<sup>18</sup> See HW<sup>2</sup>, K, 280-281, and CHD, P, 356.

<sup>19</sup> On water in ancient Anatolian religions, see ERBIL – MOUTON 2012.

<sup>20</sup> On these concepts, see in particular HUTTER 2013 and MOUTON 2015b, with further references.

In the purification ritual CTH 409, performed by the “old woman” Tunnawiya in order to solve a variety of problems relating to a person’s impurity,<sup>21</sup> a series of ritual activities are carried out beside a river “where there is no ploughing nearby and the plough does not come”. In this natural setting, a ZA.LAM.GAR structure is made, where a series of magical activities is performed.

- KUB 7.53 + KUB 12.58 + Bo 8333, obv. i  
 39 (...) *ku-e-et-ma-an-ma* <sup>MUNUS</sup>ŠU.GI *ke-e da-aš-ki-iz-zi* EGIR-an-ma-aš-ša-an  
 40 *ÍD-i pé-ra-an* <sup>GIŠ</sup>ZA.LAM.GAR <sup>HI.A</sup> ŠA GI *ka-ru-ú i-ia-an-ta i-ia-an-zi-ma*  
 41 *ku-wa-pí nu ku-wa-pí har-ša-u-wa-ar ma-ni-in-ku-wa-an* NU.GÁL  
 42 [<sup>GIŠ</sup>A]PIN *Ú-UL\* a-ra-an-za nu* <sup>GIŠ</sup>ZA.LAM.GAR *a-pí-ia i-ia-an-za*  
 (...) While the old woman is getting these (things), in front of the river a ZA.LAM.GAR structure of reeds has already been made. Where do they make (it)? Where (there is) no ploughing nearby (and) the plou[gh] does not come. There the ZA.LAM.GAR structure is made.

The action of entering this particular structure, performed by the ritual client starting from l. obv. i 53, recalls, as underlined by Alice Mouton,<sup>22</sup> the sequence of ritual reclusion often associated with a liminal status in rites of passage.<sup>23</sup>

A partially similar situation is described in the s.c. ritual of Anniwiyani (CTH 393),<sup>24</sup> performed for the tutelary deity *lulimi*. After a series of operations that take place in the house of the ritual client, the stage of the rites moves to “an outer place on the mountain, where the plough does not arrive”.

- VBoT 24, obv. i  
 30 ‘*nu*’ *hu-u-ma-an ša-ra-a tum-me-ni pé-ra-an-na-za* UR.TUR  
 31 [MÁŠ.GAL-i]a *hu-i-nu-me-ni nu* HUR.SAG-i *dam-me-li pé-di*  
 32 [*pa-i-wa-ni nu k*]u-wa-pí <sup>GIŠ</sup>APIN-aš *Ú-UL a-ar-aš-ki-iz-zi*  
 33 [*nu a-pí-ia*] ‘*pa*’-i-wa-ni (...) We take up everything and we let the puppy and the [goat] run in front. [We go] to an outer place in the mountain, where the plough does not arrive, [there] we go (...).

In this case, it is not the ritual’s patron who is taken to the external space, instead the rites seem to be directed towards a group of persons, possibly augurs in need of purification after an inauspicious omen that has been observed.<sup>25</sup> After a sequence of sacrifices and offerings, followed by the disposal of model birds and roasted seeds, the rite centres on the passage of the ritual patients through a symbolic gate made of hawthorn.<sup>26</sup> When the participants have destroyed the gate and blocked (symbolically) the road behind them,<sup>27</sup> they wait for a favourable omen before reentering the town, where a meal is shared between the augurs, and offerings to the protective deity *innarawant* are made.

The wilderness is also at the core of the ritual of Paškuwatti CTH 406.<sup>28</sup> In particular, tablet KUB 9.27(+) describes, in lines 16-18 of the first column, how the ritual patient is led to an uninhabited area defined here both as *gimra*- and as *dammal pedan*, which also in this case is further described as an uncultivated space, to underline the remoteness of this place

<sup>21</sup> See the text edition by GOETZE 1938. Cf. HUTTER 1988, HUTTER 1998, and MOUTON 2015a.

<sup>22</sup> MOUTON 2018, 31.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. in birth rituals. See the examples provided by MOUTON 2008, 64, with further literature.

<sup>24</sup> Edited by BAWANYPECK 2005, 51-70. Cf. also Daliah Bawanypeck, hethiter.net/: CTH 393 (INTR 2016-03-31).

<sup>25</sup> Unlike MOUTON 2014, 447, who suggests identifying the patients of the ritual with a group of people who face difficulty in procreating.

<sup>26</sup> Or rosehip? See KARAUĞUZ – ŞANDA 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Thus ensuring that the purification is irreversible. Cf. MOUTON 2014, 448.

<sup>28</sup> See the text editions by HOFFNER 1987, 271-287, MOUTON 2007, 129-141, and *ead.*, hethiter.net/: CTH 406 (INTR 2017-01-12).

from the ordinary dimension of life. As in the other purification rituals already mentioned, in this remote setting a series of rites are performed, whose focal point consists in crossing an artificial portal.

KUB 9.27(+), obv. I

- 16 (...) *na-at gi-im-ri dam-<sup>r</sup>me-li<sup>r</sup>*  
 17 [*pé-d*]i *pé-e-tum-me-e-ni nu ti-ia-u-e-ni NINDA.ERÍN<sup>IMEŠ</sup>-[m]a*  
 18 [DUMU.MUNUS-*pá*]t *kar-pa-an ḥar-zi nu KÁ.GAL<sup>HLA</sup>-TIM ŠA GI<sup>HLA</sup> ṛ<sup>r</sup>-ia-mi*  
 And we take it and place it in an uncultivated place, an outer place. [The girl] holds up the ‘soldier’s bread’ while I make a portal of reeds.

In all these rituals, the wilderness is associated with the concept of impurity, reflecting the status of marginality into which the person subject to contamination is forced. In order to restore a state of balance, isolating the person subject to the ritual while preserving the ritual purity of the city from any possible contamination, the ritual procedure requires a change of place from an urban centre to an outer place, from the “human space” to the “external space”. In her important studies concerning Hittite rites of passage, Mouton underlined the close relationship between impurity and liminality in Hittite Anatolia, suggesting the existence of two main levels of impurity, the most serious one representing a severe threat to the individual’s life, placing him in an abnormal, dangerous position that she defines as liminal, and requiring a special purification rite.<sup>29</sup> This rite includes liminal phases that have a very clear spatial setting, which is defined in the sources as *dammel pedan*, and the action of passing through a symbolic space – possibly an artificial gate of branches or another *limen* – a crossing that closely recalls that of rites of passage.

In such cases, the wilderness is much more than simply the stage where the ritual activity takes place. Geographical remoteness contributes to the liminal character of the cult practices themselves, where a person is symbolically detached from their ordinary lifestyles and integrated into a transitional state, necessary in order to acquire certain qualities before re-entering the urban space.

Another case where wilderness and ritual practice are closely connected is to be found in a very interesting document that features some elements of comparison with the ones mentioned so far. The text, whose main manuscript consists in tablet KUB 9.28, is currently classified as “ritual for the IMIN.IMIN.BI deities” (CTH 442).<sup>30</sup> This definition, probably deriving from a misinterpretation of the significance of the number seven in the text, is erroneous, since the text does not make reference in any way to this particular category of divine entities. The ritual is performed by a <sup>LÚ</sup>HAL priest, but the exact reason for its celebration is obscure, given that the first part of the tablet is lost. From lines 10’-11’ of the first column, the ritual practitioner moves “to the mountain, in a pure place where there is water.”

KUB 9.28, obv. i

- 10’ [*nu k*]i<sup>š</sup>-an a-ni-ia-az-zi ḤUR.SAG-i *šu-up-pa-i pé-di ku-wa-pí-it*  
 11’ [*wa*]-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>1</sup>-tar e-eš-zi nu DINGIR<sup>LIM</sup>-aš e-eš-ri i-ia-zi  
 [and he/she] proceeds as follows: on the mountain, in a consecrated<sup>31</sup> place where there is water, he/she makes an image of the deity.

The description closely recalls the one attested in the ritual of Anniwiyani. In this place an image of Ištar is prepared. The rites focus on the preparation of seven large hearths where offerings to several groups of deities are performed. A sequence of animal sacrifices,

<sup>29</sup> See in particular MOUTON 2014. On Hittite rites of passage see also MOUTON 2008 and MOUTON 2013.

<sup>30</sup> I am currently preparing the complete philological edition of CTH 442.

<sup>31</sup> I translate here *šuppi-* as “consecrated”, in the meaning attributed to the adjective by MOUTON 2015b, 44-48. The place thus defined does not have an intrinsic sacral value but becomes sacred insofar as it is considered to be ritually pure and therefore appropriate to host ritual activities.



the cooking of pieces of cut meat and ritual depositions mark the progress of the ritual, which ends with the preparation of a symbolic gate made of reeds, through which the HĀL priest goes before entering the ZA.LAM.GAR hut. Here he purifies himself with the water that has been consecrated by being exposed to the image of the gods: (rev. iv, 5-8) *watar DINGIR<sup>MEŠ</sup>-aš ešriya / kuit kittati / n=at dāi n=at=šan tuekki=šši / laḫuwai* “(he) takes the water that has been placed by the image of the gods and pours it over his body”. Then he goes back to the city before concluding the ritual. Even though the exact nature and purpose of the ritual are unclear, the act of passing through the gate, as well as the ritual cleansing conducted in the ZA.LAM.GAR, closely recalls the cult activities performed during the purification rituals of Paškuwatti, and in particular the “ritual of the river” of Tunnawiya.

Based on the comparison with the rituals mentioned above, the ritual seclusion suggests that we are dealing with some type of purifying operation, which explains the performance of the rite in an uncultivated place located far from the urban context. As in many rites of passage, the hut becomes a space of confinement necessary for the transition to take place from a state of contamination to a renewed condition of purity necessary for reintegration into the social context.

The same care to prevent potentially contagious ritual residues from contaminating the urban space is documented in texts where the expression *dammeli pedan* is used to indicate the place where the final deposition of the *materia magica* used during the rites takes place. For instance in KUB 58.83 ii 14-15 (CTH 418), a ritual performed when an enemy commits a crime against the royal couple, we read how, at the end of the rite, what is left of the offerings is buried in an “outer place”: *[n]=ašta kuptar ANA<sup>DUG</sup>ÚTUL TUR anda laḫuwanzi / [n=a]n dammeli pedi hariyanzi (...), “they pour the remains of the offerings in a small keg [and] bury [i]t in an uncontaminated/outer place”*. The same description can be found in KBo 15.34+, obv. ii 10'-12', a passage of the festival for the Storm-god of Kuliwišna (CTH 330):<sup>32</sup> *haššus=ma šarā dānzi n=aš dammiliya [p]edi pedanzi n=aš arḫa išhuwanzi* “they pick up the ashes, take them to the outer place and pour them away.”

#### 4. The wilderness as a place of danger

The liminal character inherent in the concept of wilderness makes it, at the same time, a potentially dangerous place. Indeed, liminal places are regarded as chaotic spaces, since they imply exclusion from the safe, clearly defined and organized areas, and hence the suspension of order and safety.

Hittite culture, in common with many other ancient cultures, associates liminality with the demonic, as reflected in the common belief that liminal places are especially susceptible to demons, by virtue of symbolic affinity: demons share a liminal status with transitional places, because they are stuck between the two opposing, mutually exclusive categories of the living and the dead. Chaotic beings par excellence, demons occupy and act within liminal spaces.<sup>33</sup>

This kind of demonic nature is represented in Hittite culture by the entities defined as IMIN.IMIN.BI. Previously interpreted as the divine representation of the Pleiades,<sup>34</sup> these deities are now, after the studies by Anna Maria Polvani and Alfonso Archi,<sup>35</sup> more rightly identified with a group of minor divinities closely resembling the Mesopotamian *sebittu*.<sup>36</sup> They are a group of demonic entities associated with the god Iyarri, a sinister deity connected with war and plague. As liminal entities, the IMIN.IMIN.BI are naturally associated

<sup>32</sup> Published by GLOCKER 1997.

<sup>33</sup> VERDERAME 2013, 120-123.

<sup>34</sup> LAROCHE 1946-1947, 108, and PUHVEL 1991.

<sup>35</sup> See POLVANI 2005 and ARCHI 2010.

<sup>36</sup> On which see now the monographic work by KONSTANTOPOULOS 2023, with previous literature.

with the mountains, as confirmed by the fact that there were cults of Heptads of the mountains throughout the central Hittite region, such as Šuwara, Puškurunuwa, Šuranḫapa, Daḫa, Tapala and Ziwana.<sup>37</sup>

The association between the IMIN.IMIN.BI deities and the wilderness is particularly evident in the ritual CTH 425.2,<sup>38</sup> the ritual performed by the augur Dandanku when a plague strikes the army. The text is preserved in two different copies of a *Sammeltafel* where the ritual of Maddunani is also recorded. The ritual describes how the *materia magica*, represented by grain and straw, red wool, blue wool, black wool and white wool, is prepared. A mixture of grain and straw is poured beyond a place where the road forks. Then the augur takes a goat, a pig and a dog, and sacrifices them in the “outer place” for the IMIN.IMIN.BI.

KUB 7.54, rev. ii

22 *nu-za EGIR-an-da 1 MÁŠ TUR 1 ‘ŠAH’ [TU]R 1 UR.GI, TUR-ia*

23 *da-a-i na-aš dam-me-li [p]é-di pa-ri-ia-an*

24 *A-NA 𐎠IMIN.IMIN.BI ar-ḫa ku-ra-an-zi*

Then he takes one goat, one pig (and) one dog and over in an outer place they cut them up for the IMIN.IMIN.BI deities.

The same ritual operations are repeated on the second day. On the third day, a complex series of libations and offerings are performed at the outer place, where lustrative rites are apparently also performed for the heptade and Iyarri.

As entities that dwell in the wilderness and in open spaces, the IMIN.IMIN.BI are also recipients of particular offerings during the ritual for the royal family KBo 17.105 (CTH 433).<sup>39</sup> The ritual, according to Gregory McMahon’s analysis,<sup>40</sup> would be performed by the MUNUSŠU.GI in order to clear the roads from unseen dangers, thus ensuring the royal family’s safe passage throughout the kingdom.

KBo 17.105, rev. iii

30 *ka-a-ša šu-ma-aš 𐎠IMIN.IMIN.BI-aš SÍSKUR pí-u-en nu-za e-ez-za-ḫi e-ku-ut-ti*

31 *ḫa-tu-ga-u-eš-ma-kán 𐎠IMIN.IMIN.BI-eš KASKAL-az ‘ar-ḫa’ [x]x ti-en-du nu A-NA 𐎠KAL  
KUSkur-ša-aš*

32 *mi-i-nu-mar pí-iš-tén nu-kán A-NA x[x x x x]x LUGAL an-da aš-šu-li*

We have now given offerings to you, IMIN.IMIN.BI. Eat (and) drink! Let the terrifying IMIN.IMIN.BI step off the road and give gentleness to the tutelary god of the hunting bag and for [...] the king in well-being.<sup>41</sup>

As in Mesopotamia, so in Anatolia, demons gravitate toward liminal spaces, attracted to those gaps between clearly defined areas such as crossroads. Symbolically, the crossroads represents the place where two realms touch and it is therefore quintessentially liminal, literally “neither here nor there”, “betwixt and between” – to quote Turner – “any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised”.<sup>42</sup> It comes as no surprise, therefore, that deeply liminal entities such as the IMIN.BI receive offers at crossroads.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, “wilderness” and “liminality” are translations of ancient terms and concepts indicating realities that could take various forms in their manifestations. Hittite documen-

<sup>37</sup> See ARCHI 2010, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Edited by Fuscagni, hethiter.net/: CTH 425.2 (INTR 2016-08-01). Cf. also BAWANYPECK 2005, 137-148.

<sup>39</sup> Edited by BAWANYPECK 2005, 84-105.

<sup>40</sup> McMAHON 1995, 265-268.

<sup>41</sup> Transl. POLVANI 2005, 188.

<sup>42</sup> TURNER 1967, 93-94.



tation presents us with a very complex and multi-faceted picture concerning the different ways the Hittites interacted with their natural surroundings. The intricate variety of ways in which they engaged with and perceived the wilderness, cannot be traced back to a simplistic vision of the type “city *vs* nature”, “order *vs* disorder”, and so on. With regard to Hittite religion, the wilderness should not be seen in contradiction to the tamed or ordered world, or as something necessarily to be avoided.

As a privileged place for carrying out potentially contaminating rites, and for carrying out the ritual passages necessary for the successful reintegration of an individual into a condition of purity, wilderness may be perceived as a necessary feature of the ordered world. At the same time, however, the Hittite wilderness, while being connected to actual geographical landscapes, appears as an ambiguous boundary region in between the domain of the city and other spatial dimensions, which the Hittite religious imagination perceives as populated by potentially dangerous entities. There is a profound ambiguity in the Hittite attitude towards wilderness.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, this notion appears to be a particularly fruitful, and still under-investigated research topic for the study of the complex set of interactions between religion, nature and space that emerges from Hittite documentation.

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<sup>43</sup> On this aspect see also ALaura 2019.

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