

## Near-Eastern Echoes in *Iliad* XVI 33–35

Apostolia Alepidou

In *Iliad* XVI, Patroclus, devastated by the numerous deaths and injuries inflicted on the Achaean army by Hector, approaches Achilles and accuses him of being idle in the face of the disaster: he insists on his wrath, although the situation demands for immediate intervention. Right before asking Achilles to let him instead join the war as the commander of the Myrmidons (*Iliad* XVI 36–45), Patroclus addresses his dear friend with some harsh words:

νηλεές, οὐκ ἄρα σοί γε πατήρ ἦν ἰππότα Πηλεύς,  
 οὐδὲ Θέτις μήτηρ' γλαυκὴ δέ σε τίκτε θάλασσα  
πέτραι τ' ἠλίβατοι,<sup>1</sup> ὅτι τοι νόος ἐστὶν ἀπηνής.

Pitiless one, your father, it appears, was not the horseman Peleus,  
 nor was Thetis your mother, but the gray sea bore you,  
and the sheer cliffs, since your mind is unbending.<sup>2</sup>

*Iliad* XVI 33–35

Patroclus' comment on Achilles' parentage, unparalleled in Homer's epic, is puzzling and difficult to interpret. "You were born from the sea and the rocks, not from Thetis and Peleus," is what Patroclus tells Achilles, and even though the context leaves no doubt that this is a reproach to cruel and merciless Achilles, the interpretation of this phrase has troubled readers and scholars since antiquity. This paper aims to shed light on the origin and, consequently, the

---

<sup>1</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Translation by Murray 1999.

exact meaning of *Iliad* XVI 33–35, taking a close look at the common theme of a creature being born from the sea/the rocks that these lines from *Iliad* XVI and the traditions of ancient cultures in Near East share.

## 1. Proposed Interpretations of *Iliad* XVI 33–35

To begin with, the so-far proposed interpretations follow two main threads:

1. Janko in his 1992 commentary associates Patroclus' phrasing with a general idea that mankind originated from inanimate elements, in combination with the idea that these are cold and heartless.<sup>3</sup> He refers to an "old notion that mankind sprang from trees, rocks or earth," citing several sources that employ this theme,<sup>4</sup> and at the same time includes a list of passages from the Homeric epic that relate a person's character to some physical element in terms of their harshness and coldness.<sup>5</sup>

This is a twofold argument that does not seem to correspond either to the context or to the diction employed in *Iliad* XVI 33–35. Incompatibility with the context is related to the first part

---

<sup>3</sup> Following a tradition stemming from the ancient scholiasts, see A scholia *ad loc.*: τοῦτο δέ φησι διὰ τὸ τῆς θαλάσσης ἐπικίνδυνον καὶ ἀνηλεῆς καὶ τῶν πετρῶν τὸ σκληρόν, Erbse 1975:165.

<sup>4</sup> See Janko 1992:319. Among the passages of Greek epic that he cites, only two are related to rocks: οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ δρυός ἐσσι παλαιφάτου οὐδ' ἀπὸ πέτρης (*Odyssey* xix 163), ἀλλὰ τί μοι ταῦτα περὶ δρῦν ἢ περὶ πέτρην; (Hesiod *Theogony* 35). However, these two instances, as well as *Iliad* XXII 126–127, οὐ μὲν πως νῦν ἔστιν ἀπὸ δρυός οὐδ' ἀπὸ πέτρης / τῷ ὀαριζέμεναι, which should be added to them because of the common δρῦς/πέτρη theme they all employ, call for a different interpretation. As López-Ruiz 2010:48–83, and Forte 2015 have recently argued, this theme must have originated from the realm of divine speech and prophecy. It is thus unrelated to the unique and unparalleled phrasing in *Iliad* XVI 33–35, since none of these passages is found in a context similar to that of Patroclus' utterance, in which the *born from the rock/sea* theme is used to stress out Achilles' cruelty, and, conversely, *Iliad* XVI 33–35 would be clearly misinterpreted without its reproachful tone.

<sup>5</sup> Janko 1992:319–320. From the passages listed below, I have excluded on purpose *Iliad* XXIV 41, because in this case the cruelty of the given person, namely Achilles, is related to a lion, not to some kind of inanimate element/object.

of the argument, i.e. that Patroclus' utterance is built in accordance with an idea pertaining to the origin of mankind from natural elements. *Iliad* XVI 33–35 is a specific reproach to Achilles for his character,<sup>6</sup> for being merciless and cruel, whereas the general idea to which Janko refers has to do with mankind in general and does not carry such negative connotations.<sup>7</sup> Discrepancies on the level of diction between *Iliad* XVI 33–35 and the parallels offered by Janko make the second part of his argument unlikely. All but one of these parallels (*Odyssey* iv 293, v 191), as well as some more that should be grouped together with them (*Iliad* XXII 357, XXIV 205, XXIV 521, and *Odyssey* xxiii 172) convey the notion of a person's harsh and cruel behavior by relating his/her καρδίη, θυμός, or ἦτορ to iron. Only once is stone, not iron, used as a *tertium comparationis* for a character's heart: in *Odyssey* xxiii 103 Telemachus compares his mother's harshness to that of a stone: σοὶ δ' αἰεὶ καρδίη στερεωτέρη ἐστὶ λίθοιο. Note however that Telemachus uses the word λίθος in his utterance, not πέτρη. Λίθος and πέτρη, despite their “overlapping usage” in later times,<sup>8</sup> are semantically distinct in Homer: the former should be translated as ‘stone’ and the latter as ‘rock, rocky cliff, rock face’.<sup>9</sup> None of the aforementioned passages that relate a person's character to an inanimate element contains the words πέτρη/θάλασσα or any epithets cognate to them. Conversely, in the passage under discussion, Patroclus does not speak of Achilles' καρδίη, θυμός, or ἦτορ. What he does is to specifically attribute the role of Achilles' parents to the rocks and the sea.<sup>10</sup> The parental link

---

<sup>6</sup> Marg 1938:74–76 discusses with examples the “so und so geboren sein” diction employed in epic poetry. He concludes that such phrasing, always found in direct speech, functions as the standard means to express one's opinion on a hero's character.

<sup>7</sup> See p.18-19.

<sup>8</sup> See Buck 1949:50.

<sup>9</sup> In Modern Greek the former should be translated as πέτρα and the latter as βράχος.

<sup>10</sup> Bouvier 2002:412 reads this replacement of Achilles' true parents by the sea and the rocks as Patroclus' attempt not only to demonstrate that his behavior is inhuman but that it is also unfitting for a hero. Heroes in the world of the epic are defined by their fathers to a great extent (the use of patronymics is just an indication of this).

between any natural element and some character on the grounds of his/her inhuman behavior is unparalleled in Homeric epic.<sup>11</sup>

2. According to the second interpretation, the sea and the rocks function as metonymies for Thetis and Peleus respectively, on the grounds of their habitual environment: the sea in Thetis' case and Mount Pelion in Peleus'. This approach can be traced back to ancient commentators, though endorsed by modern scholars, too.<sup>12</sup> However, even if we accept that the sea could have been used as a metonymy for Thetis, something like her negative alter ego, Mount Pelion could not have functioned in a similar way for Peleus.

First of all, Peleus and Pelion are not etymologically related.<sup>13</sup> To allow however the case of a folk etymology,<sup>14</sup> which although incorrect, may have indicated to both the poet and his

---

Transferring the significant role of one's parents to the rocks and the sea, which are inhospitable environments for humans, corresponds to the deprivation of his heroic identity, i.e. his ability to gain, maintain and bequeath κλέος to the following generations.

<sup>11</sup> Janko 1992:320 quotes a phrase from Alcaeus that seems relevant: πέτρας καὶ πολίᾳς θάλασσας τέκνον, although he acknowledges that it is some sort of riddle referring to a limpet. Again, it is the contrast in context and meaning that makes this reference irrelevant to *Iliad* XVI 33–35.

<sup>12</sup> T scholia: πρὸς τὰς οἰκίσεις τῶν γονέων ὁ μὲν γὰρ ὤκει τὸ Πήλιον ὄρος, ἡ δὲ τὴν θάλασσαν. b scholia: ὄρα δὲ, πῶς αὐτὰ τὰ δυσχερῆ δοκοῦντα πρὸς τὰς τῶν γονέων ἀρμόζουσιν οἰκίσεις ὁ μὲν γὰρ οἰκεῖ τὸ Πήλιον ὄρος, ἡ δὲ τὴν θάλασσαν, Erbse 1975:165–166. See also Willcock *ad hoc.*, Janko 1992:320, and Edwards 1987, who speaks of a “kind of reversal of personification”. Taking for granted that πέτραι here means Pelion, Most 1993:209–212 argues in favor of an allegoric interpretation: just like ‘war’ can substitute for Ἄρης in certain contexts, so πέτραι and θάλασσα, being not only the residence but the realm of Peleus and Thetis respectively, may be used here by Patroclus in order to provoke Achilles. Brügger 2018:34–35 mentions this mechanism of substitution too, focusing however on Patroclus' intention to stress Achilles' inhuman behavior by presenting inanimate elements as his parents.

<sup>13</sup> Perpillou 1973:183, presents the unattested name \*Τηλεύς as the origin of Πηλεύς, which also explains the names Τῆλυς, Τήλυς, Τηλέας, as well as the Boeotian names Πειλεκρίτα, Πειλεστροτίδας.

<sup>14</sup> An etymological relation between Πηλεύς and Πήλιον could have been supported by folk etymology, which, as Janko 1992:320 rightly underscores, does not always vote in favor of a single and exclusive interpretation. When this happens, however, it is emphatically employed by the poet, see for example *Iliad* XVI 141–144 = XIX 388–391, where the poet plays with the semantical link among Πηλιάδα μελίην, πῆλαι, Πήλιον, implying also Πηλεύς,

audience that Peleus and Pelion are cognate, two more things are at odds with the implication of Pelion in *Iliad* XVI 35. In the *Iliad*, Peleus' home is in Phthia. This is where Achilles started his journey from and where he envisages his old father spending his old days.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, in the catalogue of ships, Pelion is not included in the entry pertaining to the kingdom of the Myrmidons, but in the one referring to the Magnesians, a different kingdom.<sup>16</sup> The main objection however has to do with the substitution of Pelion by the phrase ἡλίβατοι πέτραι that Patroclus employs: Pelion, both in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, is εἰνοσίφυλλον,<sup>17</sup> which according to the relevant lemma of the LSJ, means 'with quivering foliage'. This is of course incompatible with the meaning 'rock', 'rocky cliff' conveyed by πέτρη in *Iliad* XVI 35.<sup>18</sup>

Being shown as flawed, the aforementioned interpretations should be cautiously reconsidered. I propose that we tread a different path. As is often the case with the interpretation of fossilized idioms in Homer, Near-Eastern literature can supply us with a useful backdrop of relevant material that may cast light on such arcane pieces of the epic idiolect. Established as a topic for scholarly research by the works of Walter Burkert, Calvert Watkins and Martin West, the relation of Greek archaic poetry to the Near-Eastern literature has long been the focus of various studies, which not only collect and comment on parallels shared by the two poetic traditions, but also try to explain how genres, topics, themes,

---

through the phrase πατρὶ φίλω (Janko 1992:335). Leumann 1950:149–150 offers an alternative explanation of Peleus' alleged relation to πέτραι. The opposite of the hard rocks is the soft clay, πηλός, which could be also associated to the name Πηλεΰς. In this case, then, both the γλαυκὴ θάλασσα and the ἡλίβατοι πέτραι would be the harsh side of what would be perceived by the audience as calm and soft. The evidence, however, that Leumann includes to prove that the name of Πηλεΰς was perceived as 'clay-man' comes from the *Batrachomyomachia* (19), not the *Iliad*.

<sup>15</sup> See for example *Iliad* IX 438–441 (Phoenix), XI 765–770 (Nestor), XVI 12–16 (Achilles).

<sup>16</sup> *Iliad* II 757–759.

<sup>17</sup> Found twice, in *Iliad* II 757 and *Odyssey* xi 316.

<sup>18</sup> As Buck 1949:23 rightly underscores, in many Indo-European languages, the word used for 'rock' may easily substitute for the word 'mountain', but only as long as we have to do with a rugged mountain. In case there is vegetation, then the word that means 'woods, forest' may be used instead.

expressions and words could have been transferred through time and space before they reached the Greek world. In the current essay, it will be shown that the theme of a creature being born by the sea or the rocks is frequently found in myths from Anatolia and West Asia, from which the peculiar phrasing in *Iliad* XVI 33–35 could have originated.

## 2. Hurro-Hittite Narrative Song on the Birth from the Sea and the Rocks

The theme of a creature's birth from the sea/from the rocks can be traced to the Hurro-Hittite poetic tradition. It is employed by two texts that belong to the *Kumarbi cycle*, the *Song of Hedammu* and the *Song of Ullikummi*, which can be enlightening to the interpretation of *Iliad* XVI 33–35. The plotlines of these two narratives, at least to the degree of reconstruction permitted by the extant fragments, are similar: Both stories refer to the initial intention of god Kumarbi—the former king of the gods—to challenge Tarhun—the storm-god and current ultimate sovereign—, his idea to bear a disastrous monster as a rival to Tarhun, the evolution of this monster to a severe threat to the divine *status quo*, and Tarhun's attempts to destroy it.<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1 The *Song of Hedammu*

In the *Song of Hedammu*, Kumarbi comes up with the idea to mate with Shertapshuruhl, the daughter of the sea god, so that the offspring produced by their union threatens Tarhun<sup>20</sup> and exalts Kumarbi to the divine throne. The monster emerges from the sea—it has in fact the form of a sea-serpent—and due to its insatiable appetite ravages the land, causing problems to gods

---

<sup>19</sup> The fragmentary state of the texts does not permit a specific knowledge of how the stories began or ended. In any case, we can assume that Tarhun was victorious against the monsters, and consequently against Kumarbi, see Bachvarova 2014:144.

<sup>20</sup> Tarhun is the Hittite name of the Hurrian god Teshshub, Anzili is correspondingly the Hittite name of the Hurrian goddess Shawushka, see table 2 in Bachvarova 2016.

and men. The goddess Anzili, Tarhun's sister, undertakes the task to soothe the beast by seducing it.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the part of the story about Kumarbi's marriage to Shertapshuruhl, as well as the conception and birth of Hedammu is too fragmentary, making it impossible to detect any parallels to *Iliad* XVI 33–35 which go further than the general theme of some creature being born from the sea. Nevertheless, there are two points in the story that are beyond doubt and that will be relevant to our reasoning: the close relation of the monster to the sea and its ferocious behavior. The following speech of the goddess Anzili, though fragmentary, can shed some light:

[...] išḫā=mi

[ ... ]adātar

nu kwit akuwatar UL ša-[ ... ]

[ ... ]-na arunan DINGIRMEŠ-naš menaḫḫand[a ... ]-ēr

n=aš=kan nepiši daganzi[pi ... ]-aš

nu=kan aruni anda kwın tarpan[allin ... ]

[ ... š]akıyaz memaḫḫı<sup>22</sup>

“My lord, [...]

eating,

and what drinking... not [...]

the Sea (obj.) again[st] the gods...they did [X...].

---

<sup>21</sup> For a reconstruction and translation of the story, see Bachvarova 2014:144–153. Bachvarova speaks of two versions of the poem: one must have put more emphasis on the seduction scene, whereas the other must have involved god Ea as a mediator in the Kumarbi-Tarhun quarrel.

<sup>22</sup> Text accessed online in E. Rieken et al. (ed.), [hethiter.net/](http://hethiter.net/): CTH 348.I.5 (INTR 2009-09-01).

He in heaven [(and) in] eart[h...].  
 In the sea, what riv[al (obj.)...]  
 by [what s]ign will I speak of [him]?”<sup>23</sup>

CTH 348.I 5.3.23–29

[ ... -z]i arḥa ḥallanniešk[ezzi]

[...“... he (i.e Hedammu)] ravages completely [...”]

CTH 348.I 5.4.34

In this passage, reporting the birth of Hedammu to her brother Tarhun, Anzili, too upset to eat or drink anything, refers to the sea as the birthplace and terrain of the newborn creature that leaves a trail of destruction everywhere.

## 2.2 The *Song of Ullikummi*

We are luckier, however, with the second poem, the *Song of Ullikummi*. In this case, the cuneiform tablets reveal more about the monster and its character, allowing us to draw some parallels to *Iliad* XVI 33–35 which extend beyond the too broad aspect of thematic relevance. Similarly to the *Song of Hedammu*, this poem pertains to a monster-threat against the gods, a rock-monster born from a rocky cliff that was impregnated by the sperm of the god Kumarbi, again with the ultimate motive to create a rival to Tarhun. This is how this second story goes:

---

<sup>23</sup> Bachvarova’s translation, as for all the quoted passages from the *Kumarbi Cycle*, see Bachvarova 2014.

Kumarbi decides to create another rival to Tarhun and travels to the region of the “Cool Lake.”<sup>24</sup> There he sees a great rock; he gets aroused by it, ejaculates on it and impregnates it.<sup>25</sup> Before the birth of the child, Kumarbi contacts the Sea God (although it is not clear what the latter’s role in the story is). Finally the offspring is born and Kumarbi names the child Ullikummi, which means ‘destroy Kummi’, the city whose patron-god was Tarhun. To keep the child concealed from the rest of the gods, Kumarbi asks help from his allied-gods and finally implants the child on the shoulder of Ubelluri, the “Hurrian Atlas.”<sup>26</sup> Ullikummi remains at first unnoticed by Tarhun, but, as he keeps getting bigger and bigger, he is eventually perceived by the Sun God who reports its existence to Tarhun and his allies. At first, the goddess Anzili tries to subdue it by sexually seducing it, just like Hedammu. This monster though, Ullikummi, cannot be seduced, because he is blind and deaf, thus unassailable to the goddess’ charms. Tarhun and his allies are thus engaged in battle with him, but they cannot succeed in defeating him. Only with the aid of the god Ea does Tarhun realize that the solution to defeat Ullikummi is to cut his legs off Ubelluri, using the copper saw with which Earth and Heaven were originally separated.<sup>27</sup> Although the end of the story is not fully comprehensible, we have to assume that Ullikummi was crushed and Tarhun’s reign secured.

---

<sup>24</sup> Identified with Lake Van in eastern Turkey, Bachvarova 2014:154n79.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the impregnation of Mount Kanzura by the byproducts of Anu’s castration by Kumarbi in the *Song of Birth*, see Bachvarova 2014:140–144.

<sup>26</sup> Hoffner 1998:56.

<sup>27</sup> See Hoffner 1998:55–56 and Bachvarova 2014:153–163.

How can this story shed light to our understanding of *Iliad* XVI 33–35 and Patroclus' accusation of Achilles that he was born from γλαυκή θάλασσα and ἠλίβατοι πέτραι? In the lines quoted in the beginning of this paper, Patroclus says two more things against Achilles besides commenting on his parentage: i) that he is merciless (νηλεές, *Iliad* XVI 33) and ii) that he has a harsh mind (ὅτι τοι νόος ἐστὶν ἀπηνής *Iliad* XVI 35). These two attributes are telling of Achilles character in the *Iliad* and will be separately discussed here in connection to the character of Ullikummi.

i) In the *Iliad* the adjective νηλεής is inseparably linked to Achilles, since, when attributed to a person, it always refers to him.<sup>28</sup> The word is of Indo-European origin, a combination of the negation \*η and the same root from which the word ἔλεος stems, \*h<sub>1</sub>-leu-o-, hence the meaning 'without mercy, pitiless'.<sup>29</sup> If we take a look at the passages in which Achilles is characterized as such, we realize that Achilles' lack of ἔλεος does not have to do with the hero's cruel conduct toward his enemies, a theme employed from Book XX onwards; it is rather connected with his reluctance to rescue his comrades.<sup>30</sup> Achilles is accused of being νηλεής during the embassy scene in Book IX, when, despite the efforts of Odysseus, Phoenix and Ajax, he insists on not fighting, and the accusation is repeated here by Patroclus for the same reason. From this point of view, Achilles' lack of

---

<sup>28</sup> Twice as an address to Achilles in the vocative, νηλεές (*Iliad* XVI 33, XVI 204). Once in the nominative by Ajax talking about Achilles, νηλής (*Iliad* IX 632). Also in the phrase νηλεὲς ἦτορ (*Iliad* IX 497), again describing the conduct of Achilles. When not referring to the character of Achilles, it is found in the phrases νηλεῖ χαλκῶ (*Iliad* III 292, IV 348, V 330, XII 427, XIII 501, XIII 553, XVI 345, XVI 561, XVI 761, XVII 376, XIX 266), νηλεῖ δεσμῶ (*Iliad* X 443), νηλεὲς ἦμαρ (*Iliad* XI 484, XI 588, XIII 514, XV 375, XVII 511, XVII 615, XXI 57) and once in a positive sense in νηλέα θυμὸν (*Iliad* XIX 229), see Brügger 2018:35. Interestingly, in the *Odyssey* this adjective is reserved for Polyphemus, a monstrous creature.

<sup>29</sup> See Beekes 2010 s.v.

<sup>30</sup> Kim 2000:118.

mercy is connected with the fact that he is impossible to persuade, implacable in a sense. In *Iliad* XVI 29, right before the passage under discussion, Patroclus verbalizes this quality of Achilles, calling him ἀμήχανος (σὸ δ' ἀμήχανος ἔπλευ Ἀχιλλεῦ), a person ‘against whom nothing can be done’.<sup>31</sup> In the *Song of Ullikummi*, this is one of the main features of the homonymous monster. When the goddess Anzili approaches Ullikummi in order to subjugate him through seduction, a sea-wave informs her that her efforts are pointless. The monster is blind and deaf, thus untouchable by Anzili’s seductive manners. He is impossible to placate, so Anzili is advised to go away:

kwedani=wa=za menahḫanda išḫamiškeši

kwedani=ma=wa=za menahḫanda KAxU-iš IŠTU I[M<sup>?</sup>] šunneškeši

┌LÚ-iš┐=wa duddudmiyanza

nu=wa [UL] ištamašz[i]

[IG]I<sup>H1.A</sup>-wa=ma=war=aš dašuwanza

nu=wa UL aušzi

nu=wa=šši kariyašḫaš NU.G[ÁL]

arḫa=wa iyanni <sup>d</sup>IŠ<sup>TAR</sup><sup>32</sup>

“Before whom are you singing,

and before whom are you filling your mouth with wi[nd]?

The man is deaf,

<sup>31</sup> See LSJ s.v. ἀμήχανος. Martin in his interpretation of ἀμήχανος in *Iliad* XVI 29 emphasizes on the same aspect, i.e. on Achilles’ “refusal to be persuaded”, see Martin 1983:17–19.

<sup>32</sup> Text accessed online in E. Rieken et al. (ed.), [hethiter.net/](http://hethiter.net/): CTH 345.I.2 (INTR 2009-08-31).

so he doe[s not] hear.

He is blind in his [ey]es,

so he does not see.

He h[as] no graciousness.

Go away, Anzili.

CTH 345.I 2.9.95–102

Nothing can be done against Ullikummi, because he cannot see what is happening in front of him and he cannot hear what Anzili tells him. Similarly, Achilles seems like he does not see the catastrophe taking place in front of him and shuts his ears to the prayers of his comrades. As for the Hittite text, extra emphasis should be given to the word *kariyašhaš*, a noun declaring an attribute that Ullikummi is without. The word, translated here as ‘graciousness’, conveys also the notion of ‘mercy’, as Bachvarova points out.<sup>33</sup> Ullikummi lacks this quality. He is merciless, just like Achilles is *νηλεής*.

ii) Being deaf and blind and having a body and mind literally made of stone, Ullikummi does not seem to be the smartest creature on earth. The text projects an image of a “profoundly disabled”<sup>34</sup> creature, which is dangerous to the world not by exerting trickery and deceit based on its mental skills, but due to its enormous body size and strength. This contrast between his dumb mind and his strong body is projected in Anzili’s speech to her brother Tarhun. This is how the goddess describes Ullikummi:

---

<sup>33</sup> For the Hittites, *kariyašhaš* was a quality which gods displayed to men and which kings were expected to display towards their subjects, see Bachvarova 2017:100.

<sup>34</sup> Bachvarova 2017:99. According to her, Ullikummi’s disability is not only a result of his bizarre parentage but also of his abnormal conception by Kumarbi’s semen, inappropriately shed on a rock.

ŠEŠ-YA mal=wa=za tepu=ya [UL] [ša]kki

UR.SAG-tar=ma=šši 10-pa piyan<sup>35</sup>

“My brother, he does not [kn]ow even a little mental force,  
although heroism has been given to him tenfold.

CTH 345.I 2.6.68–69

What Ullikummi is lacking here is *mal*, a quality that has to do with war-skills, but is at the same time associated with intelligence. In contrast, what he has in abundance is *UR.SAG-tar*, ‘bone- hardness/heroism’.<sup>36</sup>

The text of *Iliad* XVI 33–35 and its immediate context, as well as the broader picture of the hero in the *Iliad* invite for a comparative reading of the way Achilles and Ullikummi are presented in each poem. As noted above, the antithesis between impaired sense and extreme physical power is characteristic of Ullikummi. Patroclus implies the same for Achilles. He blames his friend for having an ‘unbending mind’ (*Iliad* XVI 35 τοι νόος ἐστὶν ἀπηνής)<sup>37</sup> and deprives him of the ability to think according to the circumstances. At the same time, he accuses him of being, in a sense, too heroic. Being consistent to the general tone of his speech, Patroclus calls Achilles αἰναρέτη:

μὴ ἐμέ γ' οὖν οὕτως γε λάβοι χόλος, ὄν σὺ φυλάσσεις

<sup>35</sup> Text accessed online in E. Rieken et al. (ed.), [hethiter.net/](http://hethiter.net/): CTH 345.I.2 (TX 2012-06-08, TRde 2009-08-30).

<sup>36</sup> Bachvarova 2017:100.

<sup>37</sup> Murray’s translation. In the *Iliad* ἀπηνής occurs six times and is always found in direct speech. Except for describing someone’s νόος as in *Iliad* XVI 35 (and XXIII 484), it may refer to a person’s θυμός (XV 94, XXIII 611), his words (XV 202) or may be directly attributed to a character (I 340). Although the word is of uncertain etymology (see Beekes 2010 and Chantraine 1999 s.v.), it is translated as ‘unfriendly, harsh’ (Beekes 2010) as well as ‘ungently, rough, cruel’ (LSJ).

αἰναρέτη [...]

Never on me let such wrath lay hold, as the wrath you cherish,  
you whose exceeding valor causes harm!<sup>38</sup>

*Iliad* XVI 30–31

Αἰναρέτης is a *hapax legomenon*, but its meaning nevertheless is clear, since the words which comprise it are common in the epic language: αἰνῶς means ‘terribly, i.e. strangely, exceedingly’ and ἀρετή generally means ‘goodness, excellence’ and specifically in Homer is associated with manly qualities.<sup>39</sup> Thus αἰναρέτης, no matter how the word is translated,<sup>40</sup> should be perceived as a reproach for behaving in an exceedingly heroic manner, for possessing warlike skills to an inordinate degree. Just as Ullikummi has a surplus of heroism, which is regarded by Anzili as a negative attribute, so Achilles’ ἀρετή, a feature otherwise praised, has gone the wrong way, according to Patroclus.

In fact, this image of Achilles as the strongest and bravest but in no case the wisest/brightest of the Achaeans is not a matter of Patroclus’ personal perspective. In the *Iliad*, Achilles is a great warrior due to his valor, not his mind. This echoes the traditional image of Achilles as a hero who has the ultimate form of physical strength (βίη), but is inferior in terms of mental force (μῆτις).<sup>41</sup> See for example how this opposition between βίη/μῆτις is projected

---

<sup>38</sup> Translation by Murray 1999, with adaptations.

<sup>39</sup> LSJ s.v. αἰνός and ἀρετή.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. LSJ translates it as ‘terribly brave’, Brügger 2018:34 as ‘hero of misfortune’, Janko 1992:319 quotes Aristarchus “ἐπὶ κακῶ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἔχων.”

<sup>41</sup> On the opposite side of Achilles lies of course πολύμητις Odysseus, see Nagy 1999:44-49.

through the words of Menoetius, Patroclus' father, addressed to his son and quoted in *Iliad* XI 786-789 by Nestor:<sup>42</sup>

“τέκνον ἐμὸν γενεῆ μὲν ὑπέρτερός ἐστιν Ἀχιλλεύς,  
 πρεσβύτερος δὲ σύ ἐσσι βίη δ' ὅ γε πολλὸν ἀμείνων.  
 ἀλλ' εὖ οἱ φάσθαι πυκινὸν ἔπος ἠδ' ὑποθέσθαι  
 καί οἱ σημαίνειν [...]

My child, in birth is Achilles nobler than you,  
 but you are the elder, though in might he is the better far.  
 But speak to him well a word of wisdom and give him counsel,  
 and direct him.<sup>43</sup>

*Iliad* XI 786-789

Except for this polarity between physical and mental force that is this crucial to both Ullikummi and Achilles, manliness is another trait that both characters have in common. As for the former, his manly features are guaranteed by his genitors: both parents of Ullikummi are male and thus, having no female genes, he incorporates the extreme of manliness.<sup>44</sup> For the

---

<sup>42</sup> See also *Iliad* IX 438-441, where Phoenix discusses Achilles' inferiority in the domain of μῆτις. For a direct juxtaposition between the two terms in epic poetry see Nestor's speech to Antilochus in *Iliad* XXIII 306-348.

<sup>43</sup> Translation by Murray 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Though the gender of the rock/mother of Ullikummi is not specified, Bachvarova 2017:98 proposes that it should be considered masculine, since rocks are always depicted as male in Hittite iconography. She also puts stress on the way Kumarbi describes the birth of Ullikummi, as an erection spreading forth from one's body. Note that two male gods are again traditionally involved in Tarhun's birth, Kumarbi and Anu, though in this case, Kumarbi is the one who gestates, as described in the *Song of Birth* (CTH 344). From this point of view, Kumarbi's decision to produce Ullikummi with a male partner seems reasonable, since only such an offspring could compete with the extremely manly Tarhun on equal terms.

latter, masculinity is not projected on a sexual level, but is rather associated with his heroic status. Being the hero *par excellence* in the *Iliad*, Achilles is undoubtedly an *alpha male*.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.3 Hedammu's, Ullikummi's and Achilles' role in the succession myth

Another thing that should be taken into account is Achilles' role in the succession myth in connection to that of Hedammu and Ullikummi. Hurro-Hittite and Greek mythology follow a common pattern as far as divine succession is concerned, with the theme of a cosmic king deposed by another being shared by both traditions.<sup>46</sup> In the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Birth*, the poem that must have been the opening of the *Kumarbi Cycle*, Alalu is deposed by his cupbearer, Anu, ('Heaven'), who is subsequently castrated and deposed by his cupbearer, Kumarbi, father of the storm-god and ultimate supreme governor, Tarhun. In the Greek *Theogony* the story starts with Uranus, castrated and deposed by Cronus, father of the storm god and ultimate supreme governor, Zeus. Though the sovereign of Tarhun and Zeus coincides with the end of divine succession, there are numerous potential threats that the storm god is confronted with in both the Anatolian and the Greek tradition: Hedammu and Ullikummi are Tarhun's rivals, while Zeus must on the one hand fight against Typhoeus, a monster born by Gaia and

---

<sup>45</sup> Masculinity means acting like a man, and though Achilles' manly actions are concentrated in the last books of the *Iliad*, his withdrawal from the battle cannot be regarded as a sign of effeminacy, since it is directly related to the concept of the heroic τιμή, see Ransom 2011:39n14. As for the tradition that projects Achilles as a youth dressed as a girl and engaged in feminine activities among the daughters of king Lycomedes, this should be regarded as a post-Homeric tradition, see Heslin 2005:202–205.

<sup>46</sup> For an overview of the common themes as well as thematic differences between the *Song of Birth* and the *Theogony*, see van Dongen 2010:141–144.

Tartaros,<sup>47</sup> and on the other hand take precaution against the birth of potential rivals, divine progeny that could overpower him.<sup>48</sup> Achilles is such a potential rival.

The story is elaborately told in Pindar:<sup>49</sup> Zeus and Poseidon were at loggerheads for the hand of Thetis, until Themis informed them that if Thetis bore a child to a god, it was destined to overpower its father. The aftermath is well-known: Thetis was excluded from having a god as her husband, got married to Peleus and gave birth to Achilles, an excellent warrior destined to be killed at war. In Homer, though never explicitly mentioned, there are many passages which allude to the unfulfilled possibility of an immortal Achilles.<sup>50</sup> If the hero's father was a god, then his immense power would have caused cosmic changes, bringing disorder to the established world-order.<sup>51</sup> In other words, Achilles was a potential threat to Zeus, a possible challenge to his reign, a role correspondingly undertaken by Hedammu and Ullikummi in Hurro-Hittite mythology. This makes stronger the assumption that the thematic relevance between the parentage of Achilles and of the monsters in the *Kumarbi Cycle* is what can disclose the connotations that *Iliad* XVI 33–35 carry.

---

<sup>47</sup> Hesiod *Theogony* 820–868. Although scholars have found parallels in the mythology of Typhoeus and Ullikummi which should not be overlooked, see Wais 1952:235–240, these do not emerge from the Hesiodic account, in which the figure of Typhoeus does not bear a lot in common with the stone monster Ullikummi, but are rather reflected in later traditions, see Rutherford 2009:11.

<sup>48</sup> Hesiod *Theogony* 885–900, 924–926. Hesiod describes how Zeus managed to avoid the birth of an offspring destined to have βασιληίδα τιμήν by swallowing the mother of this child, this resulting to the birth of Athena from his head.

<sup>49</sup> Pindar *Isthmian* 8.27–45.

<sup>50</sup> Most prominently in Thetis' speech to Hephaestus in *Iliad* XVIII 429–443, but also in Thetis' initial request to Zeus in I 352–354 and in Achilles' speech to his mother in XVIII 84–93. For a detailed analysis of the Iliadic allusions to Achilles' role in the succession myth see Slatkin 1991:96–105.

<sup>51</sup> Disorder and destruction, not of course of cosmic dimension, but narrowed down to those involved in the Trojan War, are inextricably linked to the figure of Achilles. It is on this ground that Nagy 1999:69–83 has convincingly argued in favor of the form \**Akhí-lāmos* as the etymology of Achilles' name, 'the one who causes ἄχος to his λαός'. This recalls the formation of Ullikummi's name as a compound, meaning 'destroy Kummi'.

## 2.4 The ἡλίβατοι πέτραι

Another thing that is problematic in *Iliad* XVI 33–35 and has not been discussed yet is the meaning and origin of the word ἡλίβατοι modifying πέτραι in *Iliad* XVI 35. The word is found six times in Homer, always together with πέτρη.<sup>52</sup> It is usually translated as ‘high, steep’, ‘deep’, or ‘huge, enormous’,<sup>53</sup> but its exact meaning is unknown.<sup>54</sup> So is its etymology. The efforts to discover a relation between the ἡλίβατος/άλίβατος (Doric) and αἰγίλιψ, an equally obscure epithet of πέτρη, on the grounds of the word ἄλιψ that Hesychius glosses have been unsuccessful.<sup>55</sup> A noun ἡλιβάτᾱς in Antiphanes discloses a relation between the second part of the word and βαίνω, hence Buttman proposed an etymology from an unattested word \*ἡλιτό-βατος, on the pattern of ἡλιτό-μηνος, which led to ἡλίβατος through dissimilation, a synonym to ἄβατος, δύσβατος.<sup>56</sup> This is however not convincing.

Calvert Watkins in his 1995 book *How to Kill a Dragon* refers to ἡλίβατος/άλίβατος in passing, speculating a common origin between the first part of the word and the Luwian epithet *āli-*, a word which is used to define mountains, thus interpreted by Watkins as ‘high, lofty, steep or the like’.<sup>57</sup> His argument is reinforced by the fact that *āli-* and ἡλίβατος/άλίβατος are coupled with words meaning ‘rock’ in both languages: in a Luwian passage quoted by

---

<sup>52</sup> *Iliad* XV 619, XV 273 and *Odyssey* ix 243, x 87–88, xiii 196. In Hesiod, the word occurs twice for πέτρη (*Theogony* 675, 786) and once for ἄντρον (*Theogony* 483). It is also found for πέτρη again in the *Hymn to Hermes* (404) and *Hymn to Pan* (10), but for ἐλάται and δρύες in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (264–267) and for πεύκη in the *Shield of Heracles* (421–422). In a total of thirteen occurrences, ten have πέτρη as a referent, Brügger 2018:36.

<sup>53</sup> See LSJ s.v.

<sup>54</sup> Beekes 2010 s.v.

<sup>55</sup> Chantraine 1999 sv.

<sup>56</sup> Buttman 1825 Vol.2:176–182, esp. 182.

<sup>57</sup> Watkins 1995:145. Based on his translation of the word and the lengthened *ā* found in an open syllable, Watkins speculates on a common stem behind Luwian *āli-* and Latin *altus*. Leaf 1883 on *Iliad* XV 273, where the phrase ἡλίβατος πέτρη occurs in a simile, quotes Göbel’s idea that ἡλίβατος is related to βάτος ‘bramble’ and the root *al-* ‘to nourish’, thus means ‘bramble-nurturing’. This is found in the Latin verb *alo*, the participle of which is identical to *altus*, though this relation is not without problems, see de Vaan 2008 s.v. *altus*.

Watkins (for the sake of his own reasoning), the phrase *āli- uwāni-* ‘rock face’ is attested.<sup>58</sup> To prove that his translation of *uwāni-* is correct, Watkins quotes another text, written in Hittite but with a respectable number of Luwianisms, in which a similar phrase is found, *šalli* ζ *lāpani* ζ *wāniya*, translated as ‘to the great saltlick rock face’.<sup>59</sup> In this case, with the *Glossenkeil* (ζ) indicative of their Luwian origin, ζ *lāpan-* ‘saltlick’<sup>60</sup> and ζ *wāni(ya)* ‘rock face’ are modified by the Hittite adjective *šalli-*, which means ‘big, great, large’.<sup>61</sup> The similar sounds and the same contexts in which *šalli-* and *āli-* occur, as well as the complicated web of interactions between Hittite and Luwian languages in general,<sup>62</sup> indicate that *āli-* could have been chosen in this specific context as the Luwian equivalent of the Hittite *šalli-*.

The following scheme then comes up: *āli-*, a Luwian epithet, + *uwāni(ya)*, a Luwian noun which means ‘rock face’ and *šalli*, a Hittite epithet, + ζ *wāni(ya)*, a Luwianism in a Hittite context, a noun which again means ‘rock face’. The fact, however, that ζ *wāni(ya)* is a Luwianism suggests that *šalli* ζ *wāni(ya)* is the transitional stage between the original phrase in Hittite, translated into *āli- uwāni(ya)* in Luwian, which was in turn borrowed by Mycenaean speakers, as Watkins suggests, and transformed into ἀλίβατος πέτρα/ήλίβατος πέτρη.<sup>63</sup> Strikingly, *šalli-*

<sup>58</sup> Watkins 1995:144–145. The passage comes from a bilingual ritual text, *The Conjuraton of water and salt* (KUB 35.54 Vo.iii 12-21) in which the description of the ritual is given in Hittite, while the utterances of the performer are written in Luwian.

<sup>59</sup> Bo 86/299, Otten (1988) ii 6. The text is a treaty inscribed on a bronze tablet, which refers to the common practice of flocks being transferred to mineral licks or saltlicks, see Tsagalis 2017:195–196.

<sup>60</sup> Watkins 1995:145n16, proposes this meaning, considering the word cognate to the Hittite *lip-* (stemming from IE \**leb-*, found also in English lap, lip). See also Puhvel s.v. *lapana-*. It is on this ground that Tsagalis 2017 interprets αἰγίλιψ, another mysterious epithet of πέτρη in Homer: it is a compound, the second part of which comes from the verb λάπτω ‘to lick’, cognate to *lapana-* and the first from the word αἶξ, αἰγός ‘goat’, i.e. ‘licked by goat’. As a phrase, αἰγίλιψ πέτρη reflects a common practice not only of goats, but of various animals, that climb on rocks and lick them in order to get enough salt and minerals, and is hence an equivalent of ‘saltlick rock face’.

<sup>61</sup> For a dictionary entry with a full list of the word’s meanings, see C.H.D. s.v. *šalli*.

<sup>62</sup> See Melchert 2003:170–175 for the close relation between Luwian language and Hittite.

<sup>63</sup> Watkins 1995:145.

plus the Hittite word for rock, <sup>NA4</sup>*peruna*, is found in the *Song of Ullikummi* to denote the rock cliff with which Kumarbi mates and from which Ullikummi is born. This is the context in which the phrase occurs:

<sup>d</sup>kumarbiš=za ZI-ni peran ḫattatar [daškezzi]  
 n=at <sup>NA4</sup>kunnan mān išgariškezzi  
 mān=za <sup>d</sup>kumarbiš ZI-ni [peran GALGA-tar ME-aš]  
 =aš=kan <sup>GIŠ</sup>ŠÚ.A-az šarā ḫūdak araiš  
 ŠU-za <sup>GIŠ</sup>GIDRU-an dāš  
 IN[A GÌR <sup>MEŠ</sup>-ŠU=ma=za] <sup>KUŠ</sup>E.SIR <sup>HI.A</sup>-uš liliwanduš IM [<sup>MEŠ</sup>-uš] šarkuet  
 n=aš=kan <sup>URU</sup>urkišaz URU-za arḫa iyann[i]š  
 n=aš :ikunta lūli=kan anda ār(a)š  
 mān=kan <sup>d</sup>kumarb[iš ... ]  
 nu=kan ikunta lū[li and]a šalliš <sup>NA4</sup>peruna[š k]ittari<sup>64</sup>  
 n=aš dalugašti [3] DANNA  
 palḫašti[=ma=aš ... DANNA] 1/2 DANNA=ya  
 katta=kan kwit ḫarzi nu=kán[...]  
 ZI-anza parā watkut  
 n=aš=z=aš <sup>NA4</sup>p[eruni] [kattan šešta]  
 nu=šši=kan LÚ-natar and[a- ... ]  
 [n=a]n=z=an=kan 5-ŠU dāš  
 [namma=an=z]=an=kan 10-ŠU dāš<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>65</sup> Text accessed online in E. Rieken et al. (ed.), [hethiter.net/](http://hethiter.net/): CTH 345.I.1 (TX 2009-08-31, TRde 2009-08-29).

Kumarbi [takes] wisdom with his mind,  
 and he lines it up like jewel bead(s).  
 When Kumarbi took wisdom in his mind,  
 he promptly rose up from his throne.  
 He took his staff with his hand  
 [and] he put o[n his feet] the swift wind[s] as shoes.  
 He set off from Urkesh, the city,  
 and he arrived at the Cool Lake,  
 and when Kumarb[i...I]n  
 the Cool La[ke] a great cliff [l]ies.  
 In length it is three DANNAs,  
 [and] in width [it is...DANNAs] and half a DANNA.  
 What it holds below,  
 his desire sprang forth [to sleep with it].  
 He slept with the r[ock].  
 To it [...] his manliness withi[n].  
 He took it five times,  
 [again] he took it ten times.

CTH 345.I 1.2.9–26

If our previous interpretation on the echoes that *Iliad* XVI 33–35 bears to the Hittite *Song of Ullikummi* is correct, and on the basis that in each context a creature is born from such rocks, then the assumption that *šalliš*<sup>NA4</sup>*perunaš* is related to ἡλίβατοι πέτραι becomes stronger. A question is still left to be answered: how could the Hittite *šalli-*<sup>NA4</sup>*peruna-* have led to the

Luwian *āli- uwāni(ya)*, which is convincingly shown to be the origin of ἀλίβατος πέτρα/ἡλίβατος πέτρα? According to what has been noted so far, there are two possible scenarios:

i) In case *āli-* is a word formed under the influence of *šalli-*, one would need to be sure that the relative chronology of these terms allows *āli-* to be posterior to *šalli-*. This is however impossible to prove, because the extant fragments in Luwian and Hittite do not allow such speculating. Additionally, such an assumption would imply that *āli-* is wrongly interpreted as ‘high, steep’, its original meaning being the same as *šalli-*’s, i.e. ‘big, great’.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, if Watkins etymology of *āli-* is correct, then the word could not have originated from *šalli-*, since each of them is traced back to different Indo-European proto-words and, consequently, has different cognates.<sup>67</sup>

ii) The second scenario seems more plausible. In this case, *āli-*’s posteriority is not a *sine qua non*. *Āli-* could have been an inherited word in the Luwian lexicon, which, though not a translation of the Hittite *šalli-*,<sup>68</sup> was chosen as its equivalent because of their similar sound, functioning as a familiar term preferred to a new, coined one. In other words, *āli-* may have substituted for *šalli-* here through false etymology. An example will be given to explain this process:

---

<sup>66</sup> Note, however, that when it comes to the largeness of a mountain/rock, this can be easily perceived in terms of highness, since in such cases height is the object’s prominent dimension.

<sup>67</sup> As mentioned already, *āli-* is considered cognate to Latin *altus*, whereas *šalli-*, to use Latin again as a point of reference, to *solidus* and *salvus*, as well as to Greek ὄλος, see Puhvel s.v.

<sup>68</sup> See Weeks 1985:164.

The modern Greek phrase κάνω πλάκα ‘to make a joke’ originates from the French phrase *je fais des blagues*, *blague* meaning ‘joke’. In this case, κάνω is an exact translation of *je fais*, but the word *blague* is substituted by πλάκα, a word that already existed in Greek (ἡ πλάξ, τῆς πλακός, generally meaning ‘flat surface’),<sup>69</sup> and that is not related to French *blague* in any way, since the two words are of different etymology and convey a different meaning.<sup>70</sup> In this case, the choice of πλάκα as an equivalent of *blague* is imposed both by the similar sounding of the two words, as well as by the language’s economy, which dictates the use of an already existing word over of the coinage of a new one.

## 2.5 The *born from the rock* theme

The correspondence of Patroclus’ comment on Achilles’ parentage to the births of Hedammu and Ullikummi from the sea and the rocks respectively is a first indication of a possible relation between these narratives in the Hurro-Hittite tradition and *Iliad* XVI 33–35. The potential role of all three characters as threats to the cosmic order is another link between the two parts. As far as *The Song of Ullikummi* is concerned, the possible formation of ἡλίβατοι πέτραι on the backdrop of šalliš<sup>NA4</sup>perunaš found in the description of Ullikummi’s conception, as well as the common attributes that each context ascribes to Ullikummi and Achilles, point toward the development of Patroclus’ utterance in *Iliad* XVI 33–35 under the direct influence of this narrative. In the lines to follow, I will try to show that the *born from the rock* theme, as employed in Patroclus’ reproach to Achilles and elaborated in the *Song of Ullikummi*, is not a common folk motif found in myths and stories from all around the world, but rather a literary theme shared within the wider region of Anatolia, incorporated through oral transmission in the folk-tales of Caucasian peoples (as Walter Burkert has already shown) and, to take this a

---

<sup>69</sup> The word is attested already in Aeschylus *Persians* 718.

<sup>70</sup> See Μπαμπινιώτης 2010 s.v. πλάκα<sup>1</sup> and πλάκα<sup>2</sup>.

step further, I will provide some evidence for its existence already in the cultures of Ancient Mesopotamia. The great geographical area covered by such a claim, as well as the time gap between the cultures mentioned will reasonably raise questions that I will try to answer.

A quick glimpse at Thompson's standard work *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* will admittedly raise a great deal of skepticism. Under the label "Birth from rock" (T544.1) a considerable number of sources are cited, including Chinese and Melanesian folk-tales. Some interesting remarks though come forth if we take a closer look to these stories: although rocks, stones and caves are universally linked with fertility and birth, they are almost always described as the place from which mankind sprang forth<sup>71</sup> or are presented as the answer to the question "where do babies come from?"<sup>72</sup> Consequently, they pertain to an idea that correlates mankind as a whole to (a) rock(s) and are thus incompatible with the theme of a non-recurring parturition by a rock that results to the birth of some harsh creature. As for the few cases in which a birth from a rock is presented as an isolated incident, they are again irreconcilable with what has been examined so far, since they entail the idea of a woman turned into stone before she gave birth, not the birth from an actual rock.<sup>73</sup>

The only thread of stories included in Thompson's *Motif-Index* that employs the *born from the rock* theme similarly to the Hurro-Hittite narrative song originates from Caucasus and is related to one of the central figures of the so-called *Nart sagas*,<sup>74</sup> the hero Sosruqo, Sosran (in

---

<sup>71</sup> A story known to the classicist would be that of Deucalion and Pyrrha, included in the Greek version of the Deluge. Gaster 1952:125 enlists this together with stories from various cultures that employ this theme. See also Eberhard 1937:94 and Baumann 1936:219–220.

<sup>72</sup> Ploss 1884:583–585.

<sup>73</sup> Eberhard 1937:94, Codrington 1891:156. The story about the first horse's creation by a hit of Poseidon's trident on a rock, presented by Fox 1916:213 and included under the "birth from rock" label is more like a "magic" creation and does not pertain to parturition from a rock.

<sup>74</sup> According to Colarusso 2002:xiii, "The Nart sagas are heroic tales, extremely archaic and varied. They occur across North Caucasus, among the Chechens and Ingush, among Ossetians, among Circassians and their kin, and

Northwest Caucasian) or Soslan (in Ossetic).<sup>75</sup> The thematic analogies of Sosruqo's and Ullikummi's mythologies have long been noted by Walter Burkert.<sup>76</sup> In a paper first published in 1979, Burkert gave prominence to the striking parallels among the *Song of Ullikummi*, a Phrygian myth preserved in Arnobius and the Caucasian tales about Sosruqo, arguing that, though dispensed in a large geographical area of West Asia and with a time gap of many centuries, they employ the *Felsgeburt* theme in such a distinct way that a possible link among them through oral transmission can be speculated. In order to follow Burkert's line of thought, I will present the Phrygian parallel before the Caucasian story of Sosruqo, summarizing their similarities with the *Song of Ullikummi* that Burkert already detected, but at the same time stressing how all three correspond to the mythology of Achilles.

Arnobius in his work *Adversus Nationes* (written before AD 310), cites a story found in Timotheus (around 300 BC), which deals with the impregnation of a rock named Agdus, located in Phrygia.<sup>77</sup> According to this story, Zeus was once seized with desire for the Great Mother who was sitting on the top of this rocky cliff. Not being able to sleep with her though, he ejaculated on the rock, which was then impregnated with a child. When the right time came, a creature named Agdistis sprang forth from the rock. Agdistis was a hermaphrodite with an extremely wild conduct, a threat for both gods and men. *Huic robur invictum et ferocitas animi fuerat intractabilis*, writes Arnobius, 'he had an invincible vigor, and a fierce character that was

---

even among the Kartvelian-speaking Svans and Georgian highlanders of northernmost Georgia." These stories belong to an "oral, bardic tradition," Colarusso 2002:5, and were first collected in the 19th century, see Burkert 1979:92.

<sup>75</sup> Colarusso 2002:123. For the sake of convenience, *Sosruqo* will be generally used as the name of the hero in this paper, without any intention to point to a certain tradition. It should thus not be taken as a hint to a certain variation, when not specified.

<sup>76</sup> See Burkert 1979.

<sup>77</sup> Arnobius *Adversus Nationes* (*Against the Pagans*) 5.5-6.

intractable'.<sup>78</sup> Agdistis was finally subdued by Dionysus, who got him drunk and bound his penis/testicles together with his feet. This resulted to Agdistis' self- castration upon waking up.

Similar events comprise the spine of Sosruqo's mythology. Although there are many variations concerning his conception and birth, in most cases Sosruqo was conceived when a shepherd on a river's shore saw the gracious figure of Lady Setenaya, was aroused by her sight and, not being able to control himself, ejaculated in the water. His sperm hit a rock/stone nearby, which was impregnated with Sosruqo, and, when the right time came, gave birth to him.<sup>79</sup> The hero was nourished by Lady Setenaya herself and, as he grew up, he became a fierce hero, a figure fearsome for the Narts. In the end, after counseling from the Mother of the Narts, Sosruqo was wounded at some part of his leg, the single vulnerable spot on his rather invulnerable body, and died.<sup>80</sup>

The thematic analogies of these stories to the *Song of Ullikummi* are indeed remarkable:<sup>81</sup> a) A rock/rocky cliff conceives a child and gives birth to it. b) The offspring is extremely savage, thus perceived as a potential threat to the human/divine world. c) Nothing can be done against this creature. d) In the end, divine intervention is required and the creature is finally destroyed by an assault at some part(s) of its lower body, the legs in Ullikummi's case, which are cut off from Ubelluri's shoulder, some part of the leg in Sosruqo's and the penis/testicles in Agdistis' case.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Arnobius *Adversus Nationes* 5.5.4. Translation mine.

<sup>79</sup> See Colarusso 2002:52–53, saga 8 of the Circassian corpus and 186–187, saga 47 of the Abaza corpus.

<sup>80</sup> See Colarusso 2002:399–401, saga 88 of the Ubykh corpus.

<sup>81</sup> Burkert 1979:91 groups together these thematic analogies, and denotes the way they vary in each context.

<sup>82</sup> Burkert 1979 91 rightly underscores at this point the equivalence of leg/foot to phallus in psychological terms and additionally points out that Agdistis' castration involved the soles of his feet, too.

As has been demonstrated already, points b) and c) of the thematic reconstruction above are also entailed in Achilles' mythology: the role of Achilles as a potential threat for the divine world (b), as well as his fierce character, against whom nothing can be done (c). Point d), death through divine intervention by a strike on some part of the leg, is an integral part of Achilles' myth, too: Achilles met his death when Paris, directed by Apollo, shot an arrow at him, which pierced his ankle.<sup>83</sup> It comes thus as a natural outcome that the implication of the *born from the rock* theme concerning Achilles' parentage in *Iliad* XVI 33–35, corresponds to point a) of the aforementioned stories and should be read in accordance to them.

What we seem to witness in this case is the survival and transmission of a story through a great span of time and space. As for Ullikummi, Agdistis, and Sosruqo,<sup>84</sup> Burkert speculates that their relation could have been the result of the geographical vicinity of Hattusa to Phrygia on the one hand and of a common ancestry between the Hurrians, who were not Indo-Europeans, and the Caucasians on the other.<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, the appearance of the *born from the rock* theme with its accompanying implications in *Iliad* XVI 33–35 could have reached the Greek world through the neighboring region of Phrygia.

---

<sup>83</sup> Apollodorus *Epitome* 5.3: διώξας [Ἀχιλλεύς] δὲ καὶ τοὺς Τρῶας πρὸς ταῖς Σκαιαῖς πύλαις τοξεύεται ὑπὸ Ἄλεξάνδρου καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος εἰς τὸ σφυρόν. Whether this was the only invulnerable part in Achilles' body, as shown in later texts, is however doubtful, see Burgess 1995.

<sup>84</sup> At the end of his argumentation, Burkert 1979:94–95 adds a fourth parallel on which he comments briefly. This is the story of mountain Diorphus, summarized in pseudo-Plutarch's account of the river Araxes (*On Rivers* 23.4). According to this story, mountain Diorphus, which is found near river Araxes, was originally a man of the same name, who was born from a rock inseminated by Mithras. Diorphus' conception and birth, the information that he was killed by god Ares, as well as the location of this myth (as Burkert emphasizes, river Araxes is located somewhere in between Caucasus and Lake Van) speak in favor of its inclusion in the Ullikummi, Agdistis, and Sosruqo sequence. It was thus due to scanty evidence and not due to irrelevance that this story has been omitted from the current discussion.

<sup>85</sup> Burkert 1979:91–94. West agrees that, what have been earlier summarized as points a), b) and d) of the Ullikummi story must have been of non Indo-European origin. He, however, perceives the story of Ullikummi as “an Anatolian compound of Indo-European and non Indo-European elements,” since there are other aspects of it that bear a strong resemblance to Nordic sagas (those concerning the giant Hrungnir) and Indian myths (those concerning Triśiras), see West 2007:262–263.

But was the theme of a cruel creature's birth from a rock a Hurrian/Hittite conception? Some interesting observations can arise, if we take a look at the role rocks/rocky cliffs play in the Mesopotamian tradition: rocks and mountains are generally depicted as personified enemies of gods and heroes, or as genitors/birthplaces of ferocious monsters which threaten them. The same role can be undertaken by the sea, too. The following examples give a first impression of the negative connotations carried by rocks/mountains or the sea, mainly because of their role as parents of fierce creatures, which pose a threat to the gods:

- i) in the Sumerian *Lugal-e*, the hero Ninurta triumphs over the monster Asag, probably a personified rock, and his army of stones.<sup>86</sup>
- ii) In the *Enûma Eliš*, Marduk's main opponent is Tiamat, the sea, and the monstrous offspring she produces to defeat him.<sup>87</sup>
- iii) In the Sumerian tale of *Gilgamesh and Huwawa*, the monster Huwawa with which the hero is encountered says the following concerning its parentage: "I never knew a mother who bore me or a father, who brought me up. I was born in the mountains."<sup>88</sup>
- iv) Similarly, in the Babylonian epic *Anzu*, the god Ea, astonished by the ferocity of the newborn bird-monster Anzu, wonders about its parents and concludes that it must have been borne by no other than "the flood waters" themselves

---

<sup>86</sup> Karahashi 2004:112–115.

<sup>87</sup> For a summary see West 1997:67–68.

<sup>88</sup> Translation in Black et al. 2004:347.

and that the “broad earth conceived him” and “in (or from) the rocky mountains he was born.”<sup>89</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The *born from the rock/sea* theme, which is used by Patroclus in *Iliad* XVI 33–35 as a reproach for cruel and merciless Achilles, can be traced back to the Hurro-Hittite *Kumarbi Cycle*, and, more specifically to the *Song of Ullikummi* and *Song of Hedammu*, on the grounds that these narratives, too, inseparably link the concept of these creatures’ ferocity to their birth from such inanimate elements. In the Hurro-Hittite tradition, Ullikummi and Hedammu are the monstrous offspring of Kumarbi, which have a special role in the succession myth, since they pose severe threats to the kingship of the storm-god, Tarhun. Whereas the text which describes the birth and general character of Hedammu is severely damaged, the tablets that contain the story of Ullikummi allow a reconstruction of the monster’s main character-traits: it is merciless, with a great deal of physical strength, in contrast to its limited mental force. It is implacable and his heroism is excessive. All these seem to correspond perfectly to the character ascribed to Achilles by Patroclus in the immediate context of *Iliad* XVI 33–35, but are also in accordance with the broader features traditionally appointed to him, such as his potential role in the Greek succession myth. By attributing to the rocks and the sea the role of Achilles’ parents, traditionally ascribed to Thetis and Peleus, Patroclus not only deprives him of his humanity, but rather links him to a tradition of mythical monsters which are dangerous and catastrophic, created to cause nothing but chaos.

This link between Ullikummi and Achilles, as implied in *Iliad* XVI 33–35, is strengthened by the fact that the *born from the rock* theme is employed to denote a single birth in each context, and is thus unrelated to the role as genitors of mankind that rocks seem to share universally.

---

<sup>89</sup> Translation by West 1997:386, who offers this as a parallel to *Iliad* XVI 33–35. For *Anzu* see also Annus 2001.

This differentiated theme must have been evolved into a storyline, which travelled through time and space within the broader region of Anatolia, became known to Greek-speaking populations—presumably through Phrygia—and evolved into a proverbial phrase of the epic language, connected to Achilles’ harshness. This could also reveal a possible formation of the unknown word ἠλίβατοι, modifying πέτραι in *Iliad* XVI 33–35, under the influence—probably indirect—of the phrase šalliš<sup>NA4</sup>perunaš, found in the description of Ullikummi’s birth. Evidence from Sumerian and Akkadian tales argue in favor of tracing the origin of the *born from the rock/sea* theme in Ancient Mesopotamia. From this vantage point, it becomes evident that the literatures of Anatolia and Near East are valuable tools not only in terms of understanding broad concepts of Greek myth and tradition, but can also shed some light on specific arcane phraseology, the meaning and function of which are still puzzling.

## Works Cited

- Annus, A. 2001. *The Standard Babylonian Epic of Anzu: Introduction, Cuneiform Text, Transliteration, Score, Glossary, Indices and Sign List*. Vol. 3 of *State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts*. Helsinki.
- Bachvarova, M. 2014. “Hurro-Hittite Narrative Song: Kumarbi Cycle.” In *Gods, Heroes, and Monsters: a Sourcebook of Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern Myths in Translation*, ed. C. López-Ruiz, 139–163. New York.
- . 2016. *From Hittite to Homer: The Anatolian Background of Ancient Greek Epic*. Cambridge.
- . 2017. “Wisdom of Former Days: The Manliness of the Hittite King and the Foolishness of Kumarbi, Father of the Gods.” In *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. I. Zsolnay, 83–111. New York.
- Baumann, H. 1936. *Schöpfung und Urzeit des Menschen im Mythos der afrikanische Völker*. Berlin.
- Beekes, R. S. P. 2010. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. 2 vols. Leiden.
- Black, J., G. Cunningham, E. Robson, and G. Zólyomi, eds. 2004. *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*. Oxford.

- Bouvier, D. 2002. *Le sceptre et la lyre: L' Iliade ou les héros de la mémoire*. Collection Horos. Grenoble.
- Brügger, C. 2018. *Homer's Iliad: The Basel's Commentary; Book XVI*. Ed. S. D. Olson. Trans. B. W. Millis and S. Strack. Boston.
- Buck, C.D. 1949. *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages: A Contribution to the History of Ideas*. Chicago.
- Burgess, J. 1995. "Achilles' Heel: The Death of Achilles in Ancient Myth." *Classical Antiquity* 14:217–244.
- Burkert, W. 1979. "Von Ullikummi zum Kaukasus: Die Felsgeburt des Unholds; Zur Kontinuität einer mündlichen Erzählung." *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 5:253–261, Repr. 2003 in *Kleine Schriften II: Orientalia*, ed. L. Gemelli Marciano, 87–95. Gottingen.
- Buttmann, P. 1825. *Lexilogus, oder, Beiträge zur griechischen Wort-Erklärung: Hauptsächlich für Homer und Hesiod*. 2 vols. Berlin.
- Chantraine, P. 1999. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mot*. Paris. Orig. pub. 1968.
- Codrington, R. 1891. *The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*. Oxford.
- Colarusso, J. 2002. *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs*. Princeton.
- de Vaan, M. 2008. *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages*. Leiden.
- Eberhard, W. 1937. *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen*. FF Communications 120. Helsinki.
- Edwards, M.W. 1987. *Homer, Poet of the Iliad*. Baltimore.
- Erbse, H. 1975. *Volumen quartum scholia ad libros O–T continens*. Vol 4 of *Scholia Graeca ad Homeri Iliadem*. Berlin.
- Forte, A. S. W. 2015. "Speech from Tree and Rock: Recovery of a Bronze Age Metaphor." *American Journal of Philology* 136:1–35.
- Fox, W. 1916. *Greek and Roman*. Vol.1 of *The Mythology of All Races*. Ed. L.H. Gray, G.F. Moore, and J. A. MacCulloch. Boston.
- Gaster, T.H. 1952. *The Oldest Stories in the World*. New York.

- Heslin, P. 2005. *The Transvestite Achilles: Gender and Genre in Statius' Achilleid*. Cambridge.
- Hoffner, H. A. 1998. *Hittite Myths*. Vol. 2 of *Society of Biblical Literature: Writings of the Ancient World*. Ed. S. B. Parker. Atlanta.
- Janko, R. 1992. *The Iliad: A Commentary; Vol. IV: Books 13–16*. Cambridge.
- Karahashi, F. 2004. “Fighting the Mountain: Some Observations on the Sumerian Myths of Inanna and Ninurta.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 63(2):111–118.
- Kim, J. 2000. *The pity of Achilles: Oral style and the Unity of the Iliad*. Lanham, Md.
- Leaf, W. 1883. *The Iliad of Homer*. London.
- Leumann, M. 1950. *Homerische Wörter*. Basel.
- López-Ruiz, C. 2010. *When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East*. Cambridge, MA.
- Marg, W. 1938. *Der Charakter in der Sprache der frühgriechischen Dichtung (Semonides, Homer, Pindar)*. Würzburg.
- Martin, R. 1983. *Healing, Sacrifice, and Battle: Amechania and Related Concepts in Early Greek Poetry*. Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 41. Innsbruck.
- Melchert, H. C. 2003. *The Luwians*. Handbuch der Orientalistik: Erste Abteilung, Nahe und der Mittlere Osten 68. Leiden.
- Most, G. W. 1993. “Die früheste erhaltene griechische Dichterallégorie.” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 136:209–212.
- Murray, A. T. 1999. *The Iliad*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA.
- Nagy, G. 1999. *The best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek poetry*. Baltimore. Orig. pub. 1979.
- Otten, H. 1988. *Die Bronzetafel aus Bogazköy: ein Staatsvertrag Tuthalijas IV*. Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten 1. Wiesbaden.
- Perpillou, J. 1973. *Les substantifs grecs en -eús*. PhD diss., Université Paris-Sorbonne.
- Ploss, H. H. 1884. *Das Kind in Brauch und Sitte der Völker: Anthropologische studien*. Leipzig.
- Puhvel, J. 1984–2011. *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*. 10 vols. Berlin.

- Ransom, C. 2011. "Aspects of Effeminacy and Masculinity in the *Iliad*." *Antichthon* 45:35–57.
- Rieken, E. et. al. eds. n.d. *Konkordanz der hethitischen Keilschrifttafeln*. [https://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/hetkonk/hetkonk\\_abfrageF.php?ori=](https://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/hetkonk/hetkonk_abfrageF.php?ori=) (accessed on December 12, 2018)
- Rutherford, I. 2009. "Hesiod and the Literary Traditions of the Near East". In *Brill's Companion to Hesiod*, ed. F. Montanari, A. Rengakos, and C. Tsagalis, 9–35. Leiden.
- Slatkin, L. 1991. *The power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad*. Berkeley.
- Thompson, S. 1955–1958. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: a Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Bloomington.
- Tsagalis, C. 2017. "ΑΠ'/ΚΑΤ' ΑΙΓΙΛΙΠΟΣ ΠΕΤΡΗΣ: Homeric iconyms and Hittite answers." In *The Winnowing Oar: Studies in Honor of Antonios Regkakos*, ed. C. Tsagalis and A. Markantonatos, 191–214. Berlin.
- van Dongen, E. W. M. 2010. *Studying External Stimuli to the Development of the Ancient Aegean: The 'Kingship in Heaven'-Theme from Kumarbi to Kronos via Anatolia*. PhD diss., University College London.
- Wais, K. 1952. "Ullikummi, Hrungnir, Armilus und Verwandte." In *Edda, Skalden, Saga: Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Felix Genzmer*, ed. H. Schneider, 211–251. Heidelberg.
- Watkins, C. 1995. *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*. New York.
- Weeks, D. M. 1985. *Hittite Vocabulary: An Anatolian Appendix to Buck's Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages*. PhD diss., University of California.
- West, M. L. 1997. *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*. New York.
- . 2007. *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*. New York.
- Willcock, M. M. 1978-1984. *The Iliad of Homer*. 2 vols. New York.
- Μπαμπινιώτης, Γ. 2010. *Ετυμολογικό λεξικό της νέας Ελληνικής γλώσσας: Ιστορία των λέξεων*. Athens.