

Foreword

When researching antiquity, or history in general, time is always a fundamental and yet tricky concept. Time is, in fact, the unit of measurement of the distance between us and the culture(s) that we study, and the misuse of this concept can lead – as has happened in the past and still happens today – to misinterpretations of the historical events in the best case or even, in the worst-case scenario, to the evaluation of history through our own contemporary *Weltanschauung*. Time is, therefore, in the historical perspective, a matter of perception and perspective.

We must ask ourselves: what is our perception of the past events? What was the perception of the people who lived at the time of these events? Did all the actors involved have the same perception (and awareness) of contemporary events?

Time is, therefore, an essential element of the work of the historian, not only as a key factor in the study of chronologies, sequences, and periodizations, but also in the more complex question of whether the perceptions of and perspectives on events differ from actor to actor, not only between modern researchers and the ancient culture(s), but also among ancient actors as well.

Dealing with this idea of time within the historical perspective is challenging, since the reconstruction of the events themselves and, even more so, of their perception is based on available sources that are partial in two senses: first, they are not complete, since even the best-preserved set of sources (written and/or material) contains some missing pieces; second, they represent an inherently biased point of view, specifically the one of the culture that produced the sources. Even in the best-case scenario in which different sources from different cultures that inform on the same events have survived, it is impossible to reconstruct a perfectly objective narrative of the events described.

The partiality of the sources is even more difficult when investigating the topic of crisis, as is the case for the present study.

This book aims to study the perception of crises in Hittite Anatolia (ca. 1650 – 1180 BCE) from three different perspectives by interpreting data gleaned from the available written sources. The first perspective that will be examined is that of the Hittites, the second is of the neighboring countries, and the third is our own perspective as historians.

Two fundamental concepts are necessary for this study, therefore they will be discussed in the introduction: the first is the concept of crisis, and the second is the concept of (a)synchronicity. As mentioned before, time is a crucial concept in the study of Antiquity, since crises are not always perceived synchronically. For example, when we compare the perspective of the Hittites and that of their neighboring countries, we would expect their records to reflect a similar perception of the exis-

tence of a crisis, since the two actors are coeval – or to use a catchier expression – share the same temporal frame. However, this expected synchronicity cannot always be taken for granted. It will be shown that in some of the case studies presented in the next chapters, the perception of a crisis is asynchronous even when the cultures exist within the same temporal frame. From the perspective of the historian, asynchronicity is at work, since our temporal frame is greatly removed from that of the ancient actors, yet if we rely on and correctly interpret the sources available to us, it becomes clear that we might perceive a crisis in Hittite Anatolia more synchronically than might be expected. Finally, even the perception of the Hittites could be – at the same time – asynchronous and synchronic, since it is possible that they misinterpreted the signs of an actual crisis as it unfolded and perceived it as a crisis only after it took place or even after it ended. According to the definitions of crisis that will be discussed in the next chapter, and together with the concept of (a)synchronicity, the book will consider four case studies that will be presented and discussed in the second chapter: the transition from the Old to the Middle Hittite kingdom; the Battle of Qadesh; the reign of Ḫattušili III; and finally, the fall of the Hittite Empire. The third and final chapter of the book will deal with the interpretation of the data: the ultimate goal is to re-define crises in Hittite Anatolia using the temporality of the (a)synchronous perception of crises as a crucial factor in the evaluation and interpretation of the historical events.