

### 3 Conclusions: Asynchronicity and (Re)-interpretation of Crises

#### 3.1 Crisis: Temporality vs Perception

After having presented the four case studies and having shown how (a)synchronic these three different perspectives were and whether and how multitemporality plays a role, it is now possible to draw some concluding remarks.

First, it is always important to consider from which perspective a crisis is evaluated. This is not only a simple matter of emic versus etic perspective, but the infosphere,<sup>192</sup> i. e., the sources available to the actors involved, also plays a significant role, and must therefore always be considered when describing and evaluating a crisis. In Hittite history, not only are the sources partial and incomplete on the one side, and at least partially biased on the other, but different actors – or to put it more precisely, different perspectives – have different access to the sources. This produces asynchronicity not only between the perspective of historians and that of the ancient actors, but also between the Hittites and the neighboring polities, since they also had differing access to multiple sources.

This was evident in the case of the Battle of Qadesh, where the Egyptian audience was overloaded with the Ramesside propaganda, while the impact of the event and its narrative was definitely less significant on the Hittite audience, who was probably more involved in the aftermath.

Second, a crisis may not necessarily been perceived synchronically across the different perspectives and/or by the actors involved in it, and this was dependent not only on access to the sources, as already pointed out, but also on the type of crisis. A good example here are the crises that can be described as transitional, as was shown in the case studies of the reign of Ḫattušili III and the end of the Hittite Empire.

While it is true that any crisis can be considered transitional, since there is always necessarily a before and an after for any event occurring in time, these specific crises are transitional on a longer temporal scale, and they are slower in their unfolding and their effects. These, therefore, are the characteristics that allow us to define the category of transitional crises.

However, for crises that are more punctuated, or have as an apical moment of crisis a specific event, as for instance in the cases of the succession to the throne or the Battle of Qadesh, access to the sources was a more significant factor and deter-

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mined how the involved actors perceived (or did not perceive) the crisis. A further element to consider is also the purpose and the intended audience of the sources, since these influenced perceptions of the crisis as well.

The reign of Ḫattušili III represents a good example of this phenomenon, since the audience who had access to the internal sources was very different from the one that had access to the international ones. In this case, the sources are the potential trigger for asynchronicity across all perspectives, since they interpreted the dynastic crisis to the internal audience, presented a strong and stable international power to the neighboring polities, and at least on a first glance, presented to modern historians the idea that the reign of Ḫattušili III represented the apogee of the Empire.

Finally, we must turn to the relation between (a)synchronicity and multitemporality.

In the majority of the cases the two factors run parallel, but in some cases uneven access to different types of sources can result in asynchronic phenomena surfacing even within the same temporal frame, as we have seen for the reign of Ḫattušili III and also, at least in part, for the Battle of Qadesh.

This is a factor that influences all the case studies, depending partially on the bias of the sources and partially on their accessibility. The phenomenon is also influenced by the type of the crisis and by how the actors who hold the different perspectives are involved.

How a crisis should be categorized varies depending on different perspectives, and the categorization used here is clearly rooted in an etic standpoint. However, my evaluations of the crises are based on the sources available, therefore, my hope is that the data have been correctly interpreted, and my goal has been to evaluate each crisis in a way that is as close as possible to the emic perspective.

This consideration prompts reflection on ancient actors understood crises. In their world, changes often occurred and were perceived on a much longer time scale than today, yet changes on shorter temporal scales were also constantly present. This distinction influences the concept of crisis and, even more so, the factors identified as critical. Conflict was pervasive and often mitigated by diplomacy, while drought, famine, and depopulation were generally viewed as more significant triggers of potentially catastrophic crises. Moreover, the consequences of a crisis also shaped its definition: is a crisis something that radically transforms the known world, or is it a transitional phase that induces changes without producing drastic consequences? As we have observed, the definition of crisis is highly flexible, and we cannot ascertain how the Hittites might have defined it.

From the sources we can reconstruct, there is a sensitivity to critical periods, particularly regarding the case of the dynastic crisis that began with Ḫattušili III, and in the case of Telipinu and the regulation of the succession to the throne. How-

ever, the Battle of Qadesh and the final years of the empire are not presented – either implicitly or explicitly – in terms of crisis, especially not as an imminent catastrophic crisis.

It is now necessary to return to the concepts that represent the pillars of this study: (a)synchronicity and crisis.

As the case studies have shown, these two concepts are strongly intertwined. In particular, temporal frames together with access to the sources determined the perceptions of the crisis, and specifically its asynchronicity or its synchronicity across the three perspectives. In turn, the synchronic or asynchronous perception of the crisis from the three different perspectives determines how the crisis is evaluated, and this evaluation can differ significantly among the three perspectives, regardless of whether they share the same temporal frame or not.

### 3.2 Re-interpreting Crisis in Hittite History

Since the concept of (a)synchronicity and crisis, as well as their connection, have been explored, it is now time to draw some more specific conclusions from the four case studies and the type of crises that they represent, and to try – if possible – to (re)-evaluate them.

In the case of the “Proclamation” of Telipinu the crisis, the recurring critical moment of the succession to the throne, seems to have been perceived synchronically by all actors involved. However, the text might lead to an incorrect interpretation of such a crisis, that it might have been indeed perceived, at least by some actors, asynchronously.

The second case study, the Battle of Qadesh, can be interpreted differently after the evaluation of the sources available, their purpose, and also after having considered the role of asynchronicity.

The clash itself, as well as its immediate consequences, did not change the political scenario of the regional system in the Late Bronze Age. As has been shown, the battle represents the culminating point of a crisis that began long before it. However, its centrality as event for the history of the Ancient Western Asia is likely less important than historians and in general our contemporaries usually perceive. In this case, in fact, the evaluation of the sources causes a reevaluation of the Battle of Qadesh as a significant yet not exceptional conflict between two polities.

The reign of Ḫattušili III is probably the most complex case study to reevaluate, since the sources were predominantly created by the scribes of Ḫattušili III himself, therefore there are few other sources with which to compare them. Furthermore, since the reign of Ḫattušili III has traditionally been thought to represent the apogee of the Hittite Empire, probably because of the conclusion of the

peace treaty with Egypt, interpreting it as a transitional crisis is something that must be supported by the sources. Indeed, they reveal a duality: on the one hand, they clearly show the internal dynastic crisis that resulted in consequences that lasted through the reigns of Ḫattušili's successors; on the other hand, the sources also show a great degree of stability in the international relations, despite some tensions related to the presence of Urḫi-Teššup in Egypt.

The reign of Ḫattušili III represents a very good example of the fact that it is often problematic to define a period simply as a crisis, it is also necessary to define the type of crisis, or, in other words, from which perspective it can be considered a crisis.

The last case study, the end of the Hittite Empire, shows possibly the highest degree of asynchronicity between the ancient temporality and perspectives and ours. However, it also represents a paradigmatic example of how the scholarship reevaluated the sources available and has already reinterpreted this period. The multifactorial difficulties that caused the end of the Hittite Empire and of the regional system can be considered a crisis as a unique and final point, since there was a change in the social and political structures and in the economic networks. However, the focus of the most recent scholarship is not on the end itself but on the causes of the changes and on the elements of continuity. This aligns our perspective more synchronously with that of the ancient actors, despite the different temporal frames.

To conclude, it is important to reiterate that our perspective is always *etic*, meaning we are the ones who define a “crisis” as such. However, it is essential to define the term crisis and, as we have seen, there are different types of crises that can be defined and described on the basis of the available sources. The fundamental question is therefore not so much whether a period can be considered a crisis, but what type of crisis it is, and what the sources say about it. The ultimate goal in answering this question is to bring our perspectives as close as possible to that of the ancient actors or, at least, to understand their (often) different perspectives. By doing this it is possible to reduce the inconsistencies produced by asynchronicity and to gain a better understanding of the “big picture”, in which the different actors perceived and reacted to the crises and their challenges.

The investigation of the four case studies also showed that the definition and evaluation of a crisis are challenging. To this end several factors play a fundamental role: Not only the temporality *per se*, but more specifically the intersection of the temporalities of the different perspectives, and, in turn, the asynchronicity that emerges even within the same temporal frame due to different access to different sources. Since our ultimate goal, as historians, is to understand the *emic* perspective(s) of the ancient cultures as closely as possible, it is important to always remember that in order to do so, it is necessary to eliminate the temporal

noise of the message and to stay, as far as possible, in sync with the sources, always remembering that the ancient actors created them not for us, but for themselves, their purposes, their agendas, and in their time.