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Guilt and Remembrance: On the Theologization of History in the Ancient Near East

For Friedrich H. Tenbruck

History can be defined as the fusion of action and memory. It comes into being with the formation of structured spheres for action, on the one hand, and the crystallization of memorable significance and significant events which must be obligatorily memorialized, on the other – and the subsequent fixation of such meanings in memory. History alters its structure in accordance with two prime categories of change: that to which the spheres for possible action and latitude of choice are subject, and that to which the forms and functions, institutions and organs of memory are subject. Consequently, history is not simply *written* differently depending on the varying socio-cultural frameworks of action and remembrance – it is also differentially experienced and indeed differently "made" in accordance with those frameworks.

The question recently raised by Tenbruck regarding "history of society or world history"[1] involves both sides of this syndrome: the "world" seen as an arena for action and "society" as the bearer of memory, linking up with and guiding such action. In the present paper, I intend to demonstrate that the interlinkages in foreign policy in the political universe which began to crystallize in the Bronze Age – the genesis of the "ancient world" and the "ecumenic age"[2] – engendered a structural change not only in the spheres of action, but also in memory itself. That structural change was brought about in the specific form of memory bound up with the obligation to adhere to long-term pacts and alliances and the validity of binding treaties and laws. The ties to which human beings became subject, both internally and externally, in the wake of the formation of organized state

polities laid claim to the future and, together with the incipient sphere of action called "world," also created that socially constructed sphere of time in which remembered history takes place.

The time was ripe 20 years ago to counter the widespread cliché that peoples lacking a written language had no historical consciousness – indeed no history. Professor Rüdiger Schott's famous inaugural lecture at the University of Münster on the "historical consciousness of peoples without written records" helped in assisting a quite different perspective to gain scholarly currency. In the meantime, the concept of "oral history" has dissolved the nexus between writing and history. Historical consciousness has become an anthropological universal. The cultural anthropologist E. Rothacker commented along these lines as early as 1931, saying that he viewed "historical consciousness" and a "historical sense" as a veritable primal human drive "to preserve events and figures from the past, remember and narrate."[3] Schott notes that "historical sense is an elementary human quality, bound up with man's being as a cultural animal." Schott anchored this "primal drive" in functionally concrete realities, and was able to demonstrate that "oral historical traditions, even more than written accounts, are closely linked to the groups on whose fate they report." They are not only connected with these groups, but themselves exert a binding power. They are the most binding social glue since they narrate events upon which the group "bases the consciousness of its unity and uniqueness."[4]

This is undoubtedly correct – so much so in fact that there is no need today to accentuate its significance. A more intriguing question nowadays queries the differential relative strength of this human "primal drive": why is it so much more highly developed in some societies than in others?[5] In addition, some societies appear not only to have developed this supposed "drive" to a far lesser degree than others, but attempt to work against it. For this reason, I tend to doubt that any such thing that might be termed a "historical sense" actually exists.

Rather, I would prefer to proceed from the assumption, taking my cue from Nietzsche, that human beings have a basic and natural tendency to *forget* rather than to engage in remembrance. Seen from that perspective, the problem worth explaining is actually a quite different one: namely why should there be any interest in the past, its investigation and systematic treatment? Instead of resorting to the postulation of any special sense or drive, I think it is more meaningful to pose a question in each individual instance: what was it that motivated human beings here to start delving into their past and doing something with it? I would like to propose the thesis that this interest in the past, down to a relatively late period, was not any general "historical" interest, but was guided by other motives: namely a specific interest in legitimation, justification, reconciliation and change. In this sense, it is possible to inquire into the "incentives" (*Inzentive*) and "quietives" (*Quietive*) of historical memory – i.e., its triggering and impeding factors.

Ancient Egyptian culture lends itself to such an approach in a particular degree. That was a society whose past was present to it in monumentally impressive form, a past it had surveyed with the aid of annals and lists of kings. Yet this was a past it was at a virtual loss to "do" anything with.

Documentation – Incentive or "Quietive" of Memory?

It is an evident hypothesis that the Egyptians, as the people with the longest memory (next to the Sumerians) on the basis of their unbroken tradition extending back over several millennia, developed a historical consciousness which was especially differentiated and pronounced. Here, if anywhere, one expects to encounter an abounding interest in the past, an abundance of narratives dealing with the great kings of the early era, present for all to see in their monuments, perhaps epic tales about the great accomplishments of the founders of the polity, stories about wars, technical feats of engineering, etc. But nothing of the like is contained in the sources. Much of this type can be found in Herodotus, and was therefore alive in the oral history of the later period. Yet the official

sources do something quite different with history: the king-lists and annals show themselves to be a quietive, not an incentive for historiography.

This topos of the people with the longest memory goes back to Herodotus. He reckons the length of this memory at 341 generations, according to his calculations amounting to 11,340 years. Documented history in Egypt is supposed to extend that far back in time. Herodotus writes:

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> The sun, however, had within this period of time, on four several occasions, moved from his wonted course, twice rising where he now sets, and twice setting where he now rises. Egypt was in no degree affected by these changes; the productions of the land, and of the river, remained the same; nor was there anything unusual either in the diseases or the deaths.[6]

I do not wish to deal here with Herodotus' abstruse astronomy.[7] What is more interesting is his conclusion. What do the Egyptians derive from their well-documented retrospective glance into history? A major insight: namely that nothing has changed. And it is to demonstrate this that one has the king-lists, annals and other documents.[8] They do not prove the significant importance of history, but rather its triviality. The king-lists open up the past, but do not invite one to deal with that past. By documenting it, they withdraw it from the realm of imagination.

Only when one deals with the gods does history become interesting. But that is where it ceases to be history in our sense, and becomes mythology. The time of the gods is the time of the great events, the time of change from which the world as we have known it for 12,000 years emerged. That is a period that can be narrated about because there is indeed something worth telling. We call these tales myths. They deal with the way the world has become what it is, as well as the mechanisms, rites and institutions which are there to make sure that world does not disappear again, and which thus protect that world from any further change and discontinuity. We can therefore come to the following general conclusion:

the entire intensive occupation with the past reflected in ancient Near Eastern time-reckoning, annals and king-lists serves to shut off history and enhance its desemiotization.

In the meanwhile, we have learned enough about the Egyptian and Mesopotamian documentation media to be able to state with some certainty that we are not dealing in these cases with anything that might be called "internalized history." Memory in the sense of *internalized past* relates to mythical, not historical, time – because mythical time is a time of becoming, while historical time is seen as the continuation of what has already become. As such, it corresponds totally to the "eternal present" of totalitarian regimes as depicted by Orwell.[9] Internalized, or more precisely *er-innerte*, past finds its proper form in narrative. This tale has a function: either it becomes the "engine of development," to use Lévi-Strauss's term,[10] or it furnishes the basis for continuity. Yet in no case is the past remembered "for its own sake."

One such example is the story of the fall of the fortress of Masada.[11] In modern Israel, that story has taken on the function of a founding story. The ruins of Masada were not only uncovered according to the rules of archaeological art, but were transformed into a national shrine, where the recruits to the Israeli army must swear their allegiance. The story has been handed down by Josephus in Book 7 of *The Jewish War*. Its interest does not lie in the objectivity of the presentation or its archaeological verification, but rather in the grounding function it serves. The concept "founding story" refers to a kind of function. What matters is how it is fulfilled. There is a truly fundamental difference whether a founding story takes place *in illo tempore*, from which the advancing present does not distance itself, and which is rendered presence, actualized again and again in rites and festivals, or whether that story occurs in historical time, and thus is at a measurable and growing remove from the present. In the latter case, it can only be remembered in rites and festivals, but not rendered actualized as a presence.[12]

The fact that the exodus and the conquest of the promised land form the founding story of ancient Israel does not yet make them into myths in the sense of recurrent events in the

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world of the gods, as Eliade has described.[13] Israel's move consists in changing the function of the "founding story": where the neighboring cultures ground themselves on cosmic myths, Israel introduces a historical myth, thus "internalizing" its "historical becoming." And here it is undoubtedly appropriate to continue the thought by citing the Lévi-Straussian concept: namely, this was done in order to make that historical myth into an engine of Israel's development. Myth is past that has been condensed into founding story.

Semiotization of History in the Context of Guilt

Along with annals and king-lists as instruments of chronological control and orientation, classifiable as the media of a specific "cold" brand of memory,[14] other genres develop in the ancient Near East (first in Mesopotamia, later in Egypt) which are categorizable as "historical texts," though not as historiography. I am referring here to the *res gestae* (*Tatenberichte*) of rulers in Mesopotamia, the so-called royal novellas (*Königsnovellen*) and other royal inscriptions in Egypt. Common to them is the feature that they do not reach back into the past, but rather wish to preserve contemporary events for future memory. In Mesopotamia, there is also an abundance of additional genres such as names, pseudo-stelae, letters of gods, building inscriptions – and these exceed by far anything similar produced in Egypt. The difference between these two cultures in regard to the experience and recording of history is that Mesopotamia possessed a culture of divination, while Egypt did not. We will deal below with the consequences flowing from this fact for our investigation here. Let it suffice to refer to the immediately evident connection between divination and semiosis. In any event, Mesopotamia leads the way in regard to the forms of dealing with history and the first beginnings of a kind of historiography. Yet these are no more than first beginnings.

A dramatic turning-point can be found in the second half of the second millennium, i.e., the Late Bronze Age. Texts become richer, reach back further into the past, narrate in a more exact manner and construe more extensive and

embracing connections. The Hittite texts are the highpoint of this development, in particular, three works written in close temporal proximity: the *Deeds of Suppiluliumas*, the *Ten-Year Annals* and the *Detailed Annals* of Mursilis. In these works, composed ca. 1320 B.C.E., Mursilis gives an account not only of his own reign, but that of his father Suppiluliumas as well. This is unique, and especially important for our considerations because here, for the first time, the past is made into an object for the writing of history.[15] This text also represents the apex of Hittite historical writing; within the text itself, Tablet 7 constitutes the unmistakable climactic passage:

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> While my father was down in the country of Karkamis, he dispatched Lupakkis and Tessub-zalmas to the country of Amqa. They proceeded to attack the country of Amqa and brought deportees, cattle (and) sheep before my father. When the people of the land of Egypt heard about the attack on Amqa, they became frightened. Because, to make matters worse, their lord Bibhururiyas had just died, the Egyptian queen who had become a *widow*, sent an envoy to my father and wrote him as follows: "My husband died and I have no son. People say that you have many sons. If you were to send me one of your sons, he might become my husband. I am loath to take a servant of mine and make him my husband." When my father heard that, he called the great into council (saying): "Since of old such a thing has never happened before me." He proceeded to dispatch Hattu-zitis, the chamberlain, (saying): "Go! Bring you reliable information back to me. They may try to deceive me: As to whether perhaps they have a prince bring reliable information back to me!"
> During Hattu-zitis' absence in the land of Egypt my father vanquished the city of Karkamis....
> The Egyptian envoy, the Honorable Hanis, came to him. Because my father had instructed Hattu-zitis while sending him to the land of Egypt as follows: "Perhaps they have a prince; they may try to deceive me and do not really want one of my sons to (take over) the

kingship," the Egyptian queen answered my father in a letter as follows: "Why do you say: 'They may try to deceive me'? If I had a son, would I write to a foreign country in a manner which is humiliating to myself and to my country? You do not trust me and tell me even such a thing. He who was my husband died and I have no sons. Shall I perhaps take one of my servants and make him my husband? I have not written to any other country, I have written (only) to you. People say that you have many sons. Give me one of your sons and he is my husband and king in the land of Egypt."

[The following section is badly mutilated. Suppiluliumas is upset by the emphatic tone with which the Egyptian side has virtually demanded a son from him. In addition, he expresses his doubts that the Egyptians might misuse his son as a hostage, discussing this with the Egyptian envoy, who is able to put his mind at rest.]

And so my father, at their request, concerned himself with the question of a son. Then my father demanded the text of the treaty "how in earlier times the Storm-god took the man of Kurustama, the Hittite, and brought him to the land of Egypt and made them (the people of Kurustama) into Egyptians; and how the Storm-god concluded a treaty between Egypt and the country of Hatti; how they were bound together in eternal friendship; and how the tablet was read in their presence."

Then my father said the following words to them: "Hattusa and Egypt have been friendly for untold years. And now this thing has occurred between us too. The country of Hatti and the land of Egypt will in future continue to be eternally bound in friendship."[16]

This is indeed a type of historical writing which is far superior in respect to richness of detail, color and nuance to anything similar known to us from ancient Egypt and the Near East. The long and complex concatenation of events presented here is particularly exceptional: Suppiluliumas stands before Karkamis; at the same time, he opens a secondary

theater of action, sending a troop unit under the leadership
of two generals to Amka, in Egyptian territory; the Egyptians
are seized by fear, especially since their king (Akhenaton) has
just died; the Egyptian queen requests a Hittite prince as
successor to the deceased Egyptian king; there are lengthy
negotiations and inquiries, correspondence and sending of
envoys. Apparently (a gap in the text at this point) the
Egyptian envoys refer to an ancient treaty; the treaty with
Egypt is consulted;[17] on the basis of this treaty, Suppiluliumas
ultimately gives his consent.

Where is the Hittite "incentive" for this peculiar interest in
the past? The key to that lies in another text, likewise by
Mursilis; it treats the identical events, but within the
framework of another literary genre – i.e., in another
functional context. These are prayers to the Hittite Storm God
whose purpose was to help put an end to a plague that had
been raging for years in the country, and which was
threatening the entire people. The oracles were consulted, and
they referred to two ancient tablets. One dealt with sacrificial
rites for the river Mala that had been neglected due to the
plague.

> The second tablet concerned Kurustama. When the
> Hattian Storm-god had brought people of Kurustama to
> the country of Egypt and had made an agreement
> concerning them with the Hattians so that they were
> under oath to the Hattian Storm-god – although the
> Hattians as well as the Egyptians were under oath to the
> Hattian Storm-god, the Hattians ignored their
> obligations; the Hattians promptly broke the oath of the
> gods. My father sent foot soldiers and charioteers who
> attacked the country of Amka, Egyptian territory. Again
> he sent troops, and again they attacked it. When the
> Egyptians became frightened, they asked outright for
> one of his sons to (take over) the kingship. But when
> my father gave them one of his sons, they killed him as
> they led him there. My father let his anger run away
> with him, he went to war against Egypt and attacked
> Egypt. He smote the foot soldiers and the charioteers of

the country of Egypt. The Hattian Storm-god, my lord, by his decision even then let my father prevail; he vanquished and smote the foot soldiers and the charioteers of the country of Egypt. But when they brought back to the Hatti land the prisoners which they had taken a plague broke out among the prisoners and they began to die.[18]

14   In this text, the concatenation of events is presented and supplemented by the final, tragic components: the king dispatches the prince, who is murdered during the journey; Suppululiumas launches the war against Egypt and wins a battle; the Egyptian prisoners bring the plague to Hatti. It has raged for 20 years, claiming as victims a large part of the population, including the king himself, his son and successor Arnuwandas. The chain of events is also supplemented by a decisive link, reaching far back into the past. Who knows when the treaty was concluded between Egypt and Hatti regarding the people of Kurustama? The chain begins with this treaty: an oath was sworn here, later broken with the attack on Amka.

The "incentive" of remembering involved is suffering and guilt. This linear reconstruction of history was not motivated by the spectacular event of the Egyptian offer of marriage, but rather by a 20-year plague – the plague and the conviction that well-doing and well-being (*Tun* and *Ergehen*) are interconnected, and that disaster is due to guilt. The nexus between sin and sanction lies in the hands of the gods, who reward good deeds and punish bad.[19]

Since guilt must be uncovered, made known and publicly confessed, it becomes an incentive for memory and self-thematization. This idea probably first surfaced in Mesopotamia, and then spread through the ancient Near East and Egypt to Rome. Yet it is significant that the notion sunk particularly deep roots in Asia minor, the land of the Hittites.[20] Within this horizon, suffering is basically interpreted as a punishment; this can be healed by expiation of the angry divinity and a public confession of guilt.

Guilt is only *one* incentive, though an especially powerful one, which leads to *Erinnerungsarbeit*, reconstruction of the past, self-thematization and the writing of history. This incentive derives from the experience of suffering. The experience of suffering excludes two premises: the premise of meaningless accidentality, and the premise of cyclic recurrence. Suffering is (a) a sign and (b) an exception. Consequently, the semiotization of suffering shatters the cyclicality of time and history.

Events are demonstrations of divine power. But they are not always punitive, but also redemptive. The latter are just as memorable and demanding of confession. This also generates a rich literature of public self-thematization. One example is the "apology" of Hattusilis III. It reconstructs past happenings as a demonstration of the power of the divinity like the plague prayers of Mursilis; yet they are not contained within a framework of anger and punishment, but rather of grace and blessing. The report by Hattusilis can be best classified as a kind of "aretology." This term designates a tale of wonder that glorifies a redemptive or punitive demonstration of power by the divinity. In Egypt, this genre is called "proclamation of demonstrations of power" (Egyptian: *sdd b3w*). Such texts can be found in the time of the Ramessides in Egypt, both in royal and private inscriptions – i.e., in the same epoch during which Mursilis II and Hattusilis III reigned in Hatti.

In Egypt, there were from an early period two distinct and mutually exclusive forms of monumental self-thematization: the royal report on deeds and the autobiographical tomb inscription. Just as private persons never make single deeds the object of a monumental self-thematization, kings never give a comprehensive account of their entire life. This traditional dichotomy underwent a decisive change around 1300 B.C.E. At this time, inscriptions begin to occur in which private individuals report, not on their whole lives, but on a single episode that they interpret as divine intervention. This intervention makes the episode meaningful and worth recording; it also separates it out from the rest of the life process as a special unit.

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Among royal inscriptions, there are no such stelae attested, and a text such as the plague prayers of Mursilis, in which a king proclaims the guilt of his father and atones for it, is probably inconceivable in ancient Egypt. What do exist are royal inscriptions in which the original form of *res gestae* turns into a report on experienced divine aid, and stelae with prayers to the deity. These texts utilize the same vocabulary as private inscriptions, express the same attitude toward the deity and demonstrate that this phenomenon reflects a thoroughgoing change in the history of mentality and must not be reduced to popular piety.[21] The most impressive example for the reports on deeds are the documentation by Ramses II on the Qadesh battle;[22] for the prayers, the best example is the hymn of Ramses III to Amun.[23]

As is well-known, Ramses II was caught in a Hittite ambush in the battle at Qadesh. While part of his troops were still on the way and part of them were fleeing, he was entangled with a few faithful followers in an apparently hopeless defensive battle against a Hittite force that had, surprisingly, launched an attack. By happy coincidence, an elite unit with a special assignment moving along another route arrived just in time to liberate him. A map-like presentation attempts to depict the course of this battle in all essential details, and contains long supplementary text passages. In respect to fidelity of detail, this documentation exceeds by far the traditional genre. In addition, Ramses had an epic text added, the size of an entire book (by Egyptian standards), in which he proclaimed his happy rescue to be divine intervention. The text culminates in a prayer spoken by Ramses in great distress to Amun, and Amun hears the prayer:

I call to you, my father Amun,
here in the midst of the crowd that I know not.
All foreigners have united against me,
while I am alone, no one is with me.

I found Amun had come after I called him.
He gave me his hand, and I rejoiced.

"I called to god" – "I found that he had come" – this is
precisely the scheme in the private stelae;

> I called to my mistress,
> and found she had come in a sweet breath of air.[24]

The notion of "coming" is the expression for the nearness
of god experienced (and "found") in a wondrous rescue, a
change for the good. One could explore these parallels
between private inscriptions and royal inscriptions much
further. My interest here is to underscore one fact alone:
namely, that no difference is made in them between the
biography of an individual in which god intervenes in a
wondrous manner, and grand history, where kings, battles and
the fate of entire peoples are involved and where god
intervenes in exactly the same form. Both biographical and
political history become fields of divine intervention.

Theologization of History in the Context of "Connective Justice"

When human fate and political history become fields for
divine intervention, they change their structure. I would like
to describe this structural change using the concept of event.
The historical event is the opposite of the mythical event. The
distinguishing feature is its singularity. The mythical event is a
basic pattern that recurs in the infinite repetition of rites and
feasts. The historical event has an actual site, a locus in time
and place, and cannot be repeated. The mythical event, by its
cyclical repetition, structures or "ornamentalizes" time by the
infinite symmetry of its return.[25] The historical event structures
time by breaking into its natural cyclicality and dividing it into
a before and after. The mythical event "cyclicizes" time, the
historical event linearizes it. The mythical event has to be
celebrated, enacted, actualized. The historical event, which is
already actualized, must be published, eternalized,
commemorated, remembered. For that reason, only the
historical event becomes an incentive for remembering,

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historical consciousness, historiography – not the mythical event.

The theologization of history begins initially with the historical event. The incursion of the divine into the sphere of human action and experience is not experienced as a continuity in the sphere of biocosmic nature, but rather as discontinuity.[26] However, there are significant differences between divine intervention and sacred history. Three conceptions can be distinguished here:

1. The redemptive event, produced by divine intervention, as the deity intervenes in the flow of happenings. The stream of eventuality bifurcates here into the trivial, desemiotized background of regularity and the semiotized foreground of exceptions, events, though no distinction is made between "historical" and "natural" events.

2. The history of salvation, produced by the covenant entered into by a people with a deity. The entire "stream of events" becomes readable, decipherable as the history of this covenant. Everything a people experiences is associated with its loyalty or lack of loyalty toward the divine partner. The decisive category here is not the "plan," but rather the mutual self-obligation of the partners to the alliance, the covenant.

3. Time and history, conceived as the sole emanation of the planning will of a deity, encompassing both regularity and exceptionality.

For the Mesopotamian world, variant 1 is typical. This is derived from the ancient and deeply rooted, highly elaborated practice of divination. It spread together with cuneiform script to the west, as far as Asia Minor, and then with the Etruscans all the way to Rome.[27] Divination presupposes that the events derive from divine will, and thus can be provoked or prevented by exercising influence on this will.

Egypt presents us with the opposite of a culture of divination. Here the will of the gods is bound up with maintenance of the world, and thus with regularity and its recurrence. The concept of "what is happening" (in the sense of distinct events) has a negative value and tends to be associated with disorder, senselessness and misfortune.[28] In

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place of divination, the Egyptians had magic – i.e., rites which the creator gave them "in order to ward off the blow of events."[29] To summarize the difference in a brief formula which is an oversimplification of the complexity of the historical variety: Egypt semiotizes the rule, Mesopotamia, in contrast, the exception.

In the New Kingdom, however, a theology of the will also develops in Egypt, leading to a theologization of history.[30] Happenings are no longer perceived as the intrusion of chaos, which must be countered by the application of rites, but rather are viewed both as divine intervention (in the sense of variant 1), as well as – on the high level of explicit theology – an emanation of the divine will of creation. That will not only brings forth time, but also whatever takes place in time: "Your will (*ka*) is all that is happening."[31]   The totality of all happenings springing from the planning will of this god (in the sense of variant 3) is divided into good and bad occurrences, according to whether they spring from god's grace (Egyptian: *hzwt*) or his anger (*b3w*). Naturally, grace and anger are not left fully to the arbitrary will of the deity; otherwise, man could incur no guilt. Rather, the concept of guilt presupposes a kind of law and justice, which man has violated, thus provoking divine wrath. We will deal with that in greater detail below.

A second stage in the representation of history is reached when the past is worked through systematically from the standpoint of guilt – when genuine "historical works" come into being that judge past periods of rule according to the good conduct of the king and the well-being of the people. The oldest text in which the past has been processed in a theological perspective from the standpoint of guilt is the so-called Weidner Chronicle from the New Babylonian period. In this chronicle reaching far back into the past, the success of the kings as rulers is attributed to the way they behaved toward the Esagila, the Marduk temple in Babylon.[32] In various cases, the transition of royal rule from one dynasty to the next is justified by a guilt that the rulers have incurred, and the decline of the empire of Ur is associated with violations and transgressions committed by King Sulgi.[33] The idea of guilt

renders the past meaningful, provides a consecutiveness to the sequence of kings and their reigns. What it makes visible and explicates is break, change and shift. Only in this form does the past become significant, memorable and related to the future.

The historical work of Deuteronomy elevates the question regarding the faithfulness of the rulers to the law to the rank of a guiding perspective. Here too, what is involved is a history of guilt. Yet it is not written in order to legitimate a new dynasty that has returned to faithful adherence to the law and regained God's blessing. Rather, the focus here is on understanding the catastrophic events of the present as still being God's acting in the world – and the ability to cope with those events.[34] Under the criterion of guilt, the sequence of events is ordered into a history that inexorably leads to the disaster. History as narrated in the Book of Kings is generated by guilt, and guilt is generated by the law. The law, codified in the Torah, is the will of God, revealed once and for all time; his revelation has rendered all divination and reading of "signs" a superfluous art.

Periodic reading aloud of the law serves to promote the memory of the text of the treaty. Even profane state treaties require a regular reading before the vassal.[35] In connection with this custom, a public reading of the Torah is set in Deuteronomy for every seven years (Deut. 31:9ff.). Ezra, during Tabernacles, read the people the Torah day after day, from the first to the final day of the festival (Neh. 8:1 and 18).[36] The practice of synagogal reading of the Torah evolves from this, in which the entire Torah is read once completely during the cycle of the year. The verbal divine service of the Christian churches likewise follows in the wake of a legal institution which was conceived as an organ of collective memory. A part of this memory is the recapitulation of a common shared history: the sacred deeds of the Lord and the transgressions of the people. The horizon of such history is no longer that of the event, of intervention, but rather of sacred history.[37]

The meaning of events presents itself to man as a nexus of conduct and fate, *Tun* and *Ergehen*. This nexus is usually

termed causality. Yet that is incorrect, or at the very least, is highly reductionist. The concept of causality suggests the idea of an automatism in natural law in the linking of events. But it is precisely that notion which is the opposite of the conception underlying the ancient texts. Rather, such texts reckon with powers, authorities and institutions that watch over the nexus between action and success – i.e., that make sure that good is rewarded and evil avenged. In all cases, what is involved is retribution, not causality.[38] Only the functioning of this retribution is imagined in differing ways.

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Instead of speaking about retribution, the sources talk about justice.[39] Justice is the central concept uniting the spheres of law, religion and morality. Justice guides the judgment of judges, the action of kings; it guides men down their paths and is the principle binding the result to the deed. Sense and justice are thus one and the same. In a just world, good is rewarded and evil avenged. This is the core of ancient Near Eastern wisdom, which is principally concerned with preventing human beings from avenging themselves and striving for private happiness on the basis of their own strength and will. The concept of "connective" justice, i.e, a binding and linking notion of justice, would appear to be appropriate from a number of perspectives:

1. Justice binds human beings together, creates the basis for social cohesion and solidarity.

2. Justice links success to the deed, punishment to crime, and thus helps to furnish sense, meaning and coherence, "connection" in an otherwise accidental, unconnected stream of events.

Both dimensions, the social (1) and the temporal (2), are encompassed by the concept of "bindingness" (*Ver-bindlichkeit*). Here it is a question of both the social as well as the temporal horizon of the validity of legal norms. A binding norm binds human beings, binds time – by placing its claim to validity in a limited or unlimited future.

In so doing, justice creates a *memory-space*, one in which what is valid today is what was valid yesterday, and where tomorrow's validity will be an extension of today's. One law predominates in this space, the commandment: "Thou shalt

not forget!'' This is the strongest and most original incentive for memory.

Such ''connective'' justice can be imagined in three ways:

1. The most simple and widespread conception of a nexus between doing and faring (*Tun* and *Ergehen*) is represented by the conviction that good is its ''own reward'' and evil ''avenges itself.'' This principle of an ''immanent providence''[40] presupposes neither divine nor state intervention, and is based on the daily experiences of functioning while living in society. Involved here is the idea of a self-regulative circulation of good and evil, which finds its most abstract expression in the ''golden rule,''[41] though also in the more concrete casuistry of proverbial wisdom (''Lying will get you nowhere,'' etc.).

This simple wisdom is specified in two different ways in Near Eastern high cultures:

2. Political justice leaves the functioning of the connection between doing and faring to the state. Classic examples for this interpretation of reality are offered by Egypt and India. According to this conception, chaos erupts when the state collapses. Sense and order vanish from the world. Good is no longer rewarded, evil is no longer avenged, the big fish eat the small, and the sons slay their fathers.

3. Religious justice leaves the functioning of the connection between conduct/faring to the reign and control of the gods. Reward and punishment are no longer conceived in the sense of self-regulation as consequences of action itself, which is ''rewarding'' or avenges itself, but are rather conceptualized as the results of divine intervention. This presupposes the context of a ''theology of the will,'' which attributes to the gods an intentionality oriented toward earthly-human fate.

Not until it took on this form did the theory of ''connective justice'' function as an incentive for memory. Divine justice and its corresponding teaching of human responsibility imbue what is happening with a meaning whose knowledge is all-important. This process can be termed ''semiotization by theologization.''

The land of origin of this ''theology of the will'' is Mesopotamia.[42] Here one encounters by far the earliest texts

relating events back to the will of the gods. Albrektson has been able to conclusively demonstrate that planned action and an intentional intervention in human-earthly matters is at least as typical of Mesopotamian gods as of the image of God in the Hebrew scriptures. What Albrektson failed to note was that most of the texts he cites are juridical in nature: treaties, in which the potential transgressors are handed over to divine retribution.

These "curse formulae" express most clearly what can be expected of the gods: namely the guaranteeing of connective justice. The future into which these texts project and exercise their binding power lies in the hands of the gods; it is they who must make sure that the laws are not forgotten and that the transgressor is punished. The oldest text of this sort is a boundary stela between Lagash and Ummu. The transgressor is threatened with destruction at the hands of Enlil and Ningirsu, and it is stated that this will occur as political misfortune: his people will deny him obedience and kill him.

The law constitutes a sphere of norm-bound action to which the ruler is also subject. Just as his subjects are under his control, he himself is subject to the control of the gods. Calamity is visited upon a king who violates the norms. Recollection of this calamity serves to inculcate those norms. This is the topic of the lamentation literature and the moralizing kings' legends (especially about Naramsin). The lamentation known by the name "curse on Akkad" narrates that King Naramsin destroyed the Enlil temple in Nippur and that Enlil then sent the Guteans to his country:

> He let them come from the distant mountains,
> those unlike any (otherwise known) people, those who
> are not counted among the peoples,
> the Guteans, who do not know obligations like a normal
> people,
> they have the form of human beings, but their words
> are like the voice of a dog,
> Enlil had them sent for from the mountains.
> They covered the earth in great hordes like locusts.[43]

This non-documentary, highly poetic form of recording and narration of history presupposes its interpretation and semiotization. And this derives from the principle of *iustitia connectiva*, the sphere of law protected by gods – a sphere linking punishment to guilt, or formulated in more general terms: binding consequences to deeds.

The connection between guilt, law and justice is also striking in the great Hittite historical works. The classic offenses punished by divine penalty are perjury, breaking of one's oath and breach of contract. This is especially clear in the Suppiluliumas affair. Here, after consulting the oracle, two "tablets" with binding agreements are made known, which were broken by Suppiluliumas. One concerns the sacrifices for the Mala river (Euphrates), the other and much more decisive one involves a treaty with Egypt. In regard to this treaty, Mursilis avers:

> [But] I did not add a single wo[rd]
> to th[is] tablet, nor did I detract any.[44]

This formulaic claim, classified by H. Cancik as the earliest example of the so-called "literal formula" ("detract and add nothing") does not refer to the faithful rendition of the traditional text, but rather the "literal" keeping of the treaty or contract.[45] Significantly, this formula has exactly the same meaning in Deuteronomy (4:2). Moreover, its precursor in the epilogue of the Codex Hammurabi does not refer, as Cancik thinks, to the fidelity of documentary tradition, but to the fidelity of keeping recognized obligations. In the Egyptian context as well, all documented examples of the formula (previously to date not recognized as such) relate to the virtue of reliability. Officials boast that they "neither add nor detract anything" (Egyptian: *jnj jtj*, "bring, take"), and by this they are not referring to the work of copying scribes, but rather to fidelity and reliability in carrying out orders and fulfilling obligations.[46]

What then does this special sacredness of oaths and contracts consist in? The salient feature is that they are sworn in the presence of a god. This gives them their absolute

validity and inviolable binding quality. The gods are utilized to watch over these oaths and contracts, and make sure that they are kept. If the gods intervene punitively in the case of a breach of oath or contract, then they are intervening in matters in which they were specifically involved previously by human decision. Thus, gods are drawn by men into history. This is the other side of the coin of their intervention.

This serves to demonstrate that the process of theologization of history that begins to spread in the second half of the second millennium throughout the entire Near East and the Mediterranean is directly associated with the diplomatic practice of the time. All smaller and larger states in the world at that time were increasingly entering into mutual contact – and such contacts were largely regulated by treaty. This begins with the aforementioned boundary dike between Umma and Lagash, and expands over the course of a millennium, evolving into a network embracing the entire *oikoumene* of that era. All treaties must be sworn under oath, and gods must be included as protective powers of such oaths.

The world of gods functions as an institution of "international law," assuring the keeping of treaties between peoples. At the basis of this is a high level of diplomatic art, that also has a theological dimension, since the world of gods of the participating countries must be intertranslatable. In this context, religious intolerance denying the other gods their existence would be inconceivable.

To the degree that activity in foreign policy by the participant states subjects itself to the rules of the diplomatic order of mutual relations, the gods necessarily are drawn ever more centrally into history. In this system, the ruler who is most conscientious in keeping treaties is in the right, and the one who breaks treaties is in the wrong. Breach of treaty becomes the primal model of sin.

Seen from this angle, it is understandable to just what a significant degree the theologization of history was intensified once a people came upon the notion not only of invoking its deity as a protective lord of a political alliance treaty, but of actually concluding such a treaty with the *deity himself* – as if that deity were the king of Egypt or Assyria.[47] Two completely

new dimensions are created by such a move: the god as "lord" of history, and the "people" as that history's subject. Moreover, such a treaty cannot be concluded for a circumscribed period of limited time; it is evident that the time horizon involved here necessarily extends forward to the end of days and backward to the primal era of creation. It is within the framework of this new type of theocratic constellation that the concept of sacred history evolves. *Iustitia connectiva* becomes divine justice.[48]

Mesopotamian historical interpretation is just as much a theodicy as its biblical counterpart. But it stands completely under the sign of the "event." The historical action of the gods is occasional in nature, and the unit of memory is the event. In the biblical tradition, the event gradually loses its contours and expands to become world history. In the Mesopotamian image of history, there is still an operative rhythm of salvation and disaster, grace and wrath. The biblical view of history sees profane history in ever more radical form as being an expression solely of (divine) anger, contrasting this with the one and final salvation, namely the kingdom of God, as a mode of anti-history.[49]

In summary, history can be viewed, I would contend, as a function of *iustitia connectiva*. Only the constituting of that sphere of obligation and ties, which creates order, meaning and connection in the temporal and societal dimension, makes it possible to reconstruct the past – a reconstruction upon which memory and history are founded.

What is remembered? – that which binds together and is binding, that which must not be forgotten. Remembering of the past does not follow any human drive or innate interest, but rather adheres to a duty which is a component of constructing human culture. Only the cultural construction of *iustitia connectiva* gives rise to the commemorative imperative "Thou shalt remember! Thou shalt not forget!" This imperative is then concretized as historical sense in individual cultures and human beings in a manner specific to them.

Translated from the German by Bill Templer

Notes

1 F. H. Tenbruck, "Gesellschaftsgeschichte oder
Weltgeschichte?," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und
Sozialpsychologie* 41 (1989): 417–39. Cf. also idem, *Geschichte
und Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1986).
2 Eric Voegelin, *Order and History* (Louisiana, 1956–74), vol. 4,
The Ecumenic Age (1974). Polybius, as pointed out by
Tenbruck, "Gesellschaftsgeschichte oder Weltgeschichte?"
436, had already identified the process of this growing
interlinkage of events in the introduction to his work on
history, and postulated the connection between
"oikoumene" and "history."
3 E. Rothacker, "Das historische Bewusstsein," *Zeitschrift für
Deutschkunde* 45 (1931), quoted in R. Schott, "Das
Geschichtsbewusstsein schriftloser Völker," *Archiv für
Begriffsgeschichte* 12 (1968): 166–205, here 170. See also M.
Schuster, "Zur Konstruktion von Geschichte in Kulturen
ohne Schrift," in J. v. Ungern-Sternberg and H. Reinau,
eds., *Vergangenheit in mündlicher Überlieferung* (Stuttgart,
1988), 55–71.
4 Schott, "Das Geschichtsbewusstsein schriftloser Völker," 170.
5 As Schott (ibid., 170) observes: "However, there is an
exceptional range of difference from people to people in
the degree to which this 'historical sense' has developed,
and its manner of development."
6 Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. George Rawlinson, in
The Greek Historians, vol. 1 (New York, 1942), book 2, 142.
7 Probably he is alluding to four cycles, two with west–east
movement and two with east–west movement of the sun,
both contained within the span of 341 generations.
Egyptian sources say nothing about this.
8 Cf. D. B. Redford, *Pharaonic King-Lists, Annals and Day Books*

(Mississauga, 1986). On the Egyptian pride in the past during the late period, see J. Assmann, "Die Entdeckung der Vergangenheit. Innovation und Restauration in der ägyptischen Literaturgeschichte," in H. U. Gumbrecht and U. Link-Heer, eds., *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Sprach- und Literaturgeschichte* (Frankfurt/Main, 1985), 484–99.

9 I owe the insight into this parallelism to Aleida Assmann.

10 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), 309f.

11 See A. Kempinski, "Die Archäologie als bestimmender Faktor in der israelischen Gesellschaft und Kultur," *Judaica* 45 (1989): 2–20.

12 Cf. K. Koch, "Qādām. Heilsgeschichte als mythische Urzeit im Alten (und Neuen) Testament," in J. Rohls and G. Wenz, eds., *Vernunft des Glaubens. Wissenschaftliche Theologie und kirchliche Lehre* (Göttingen, 1988), 253–88.

13 M. Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* (Paris, 1950).

14 Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, 309, defines "cold" societies as those which attempt "to annul ... the effect which historical factors might have on their equilibrium and continuity."

15 H. Cancik, *Mythische und historische Wahrheit*, Stuttgart Bibelstudien no. 48 (Stuttgart, 1970), and *Grundzüge der hethitischen und alttestamentlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, Abh. d. Deutschen Palästina Vereins (Wiesbaden, 1976).

16 Trans. A. Goetze, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1955). Cf. J. Assmann, "Krieg und Frieden im alten Ägypten," *mannheimer forum* (1983/84): 184f. For the historical background, cf. R. Krauss, *Das Ende der Amarnazeit*, Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge, no. 7 (Hildesheim, 1978); and D. Sürenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge in hethitischer Sicht. Zu historischer Aussage und literarischer Stellung des Textes CTH 379*, Studia Mediterranea, no. 5 (Pavia, 1985).

17 Cf. Sürenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge*. In passing, I would like to point out a form of dealing with the past that is particularly typical of the Hittites. Before S. agrees to the project of a political marriage, the past between both

peoples is consulted. It becomes evident that such a project can, in actual fact, refer back to a solid basis in the past. Thus, all Hittite treaty texts contain a more or less extensive historical prologue touching on the common shared history of the two parties to the treaties and underscoring the past as the basis for a shared future. See H. A. Hoffner, "Histories and Historians of the Near East: The Hittites," *Orientalia* 49 (1980): 311, par. 11.

18 Trans. Goetze, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," 395ff.

19 See A. Malamat, "Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel," *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955): 1–12. I consider the concept of causality misleading in this connection; see, among others, below. For the nexus of doing and faring, see also K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (Assen, 1985).

20 "Biblical and Babylonian psalms, Egyptian and Sabean penitential stelae [are] proof of the custom, once widespread throughout the entire Near East, of the public, written confession of sins.... Augustine, in his *Confessions*, utilized such customs of religious confession as a source of literature." See P. Frisch, "Über die lydisch-phrygischen Sühninschriften und die 'Confessiones' des Augustinus," *Epigraphica Anatolica* 2 (1983): 41–45 (with additional bibliography). See also G. Petzl, "Sünde, Strafe, Wiedergutmachung," *Epigraphica Anatolica* 12 (1988): 155–66. I am grateful to A. Chaniotis for the reference to these studies. A. Steinleitner published a collection, now in need of supplement, of Lydian-Phrygian expiation inscriptions: *Die Beicht im Zusammenhang mit der sakralen Rechtspflege in der Antike* (Munich, 1913). He viewed these inscriptions as a forerunner of the medieval Christian practice of indulgences.

21 For a fairly comprehensive collection of these texts, see J. Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zürich and Munich, 1975), texts no. 147–200 (hereafter *ÄHG*).

22 See Assmann, "Krieg und Frieden"; Th. v.d. Way, *Die Textüberlieferung Ramses' II zur Kadeshschlacht*, Hildesheimer ägyptologische Studien, no. 22 (Hildesheim, 1984); H.

Goedicke, ed., *Perspectives on the Battle of Kadesh* (Baltimore, 1985).

23 *ÄHG*, no. 196.

24 Ibid, no. 149.

25 See J. Assmann, "Das Doppelgesicht der Zeit im altägyptischen Denken," in A. Peisl and A. Mohler, eds., *Die Zeit* (Munich, 1983), 189–223.

26 Bertil Albrektson has described this principle of an early theology of history in his *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and Israel* (Lund, 1967). He treats the concept of sacred history in chap. 5, "The Divine Plan in History."

27 *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne*, Rencontre assyriologique no. 14, Strasbourg, 2–6 July 1965 (Paris, 1966); J. Bottéro, "Symptômes, signes, écritures en Mésopotamie ancienne," in J. P. Vernant et al., *Divination et rationalité* (Paris, 1974), 70–197. Cf. also M. David, *Les dieux et le destin en Babylonie* (Paris, 1949).

28 J. Assmann, "State and Religion in the New Kingdom," in W. K. Simpson, ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), 55–88, here 77f.

29 Ibid.

30 I have described this process in ibid. See also my *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten* (Heidelberg, 1975), 49–69.

31 Theban Tomb 23, in J. Assmann, ed., *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern* (Mainz, 1983), 18–23.

32 A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources, no. 5 (Locust Valley, 1970), Chronicle no. 19. Van Seters, who apparently has failed to notice the obvious and striking parallels here to the historical work of Deuteronomy, touches briefly on this text in his *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, 1983), 85.

33 C. Wilcke, "Die Sumerische Königsliste und erzählte Vergangenheit," in J. v. Ungern-Sternberg and H. Reinau, eds., *Vergangenheit in mündlicher Überlieferung* (Stuttgart, 1988), 133.

34 G. von Rad, "Die deuteronomische Geschichtstheologie in

den Königsbüchern," in idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Munich, 1958).

35 K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, no. 4 (Neukirchen, 1960) 91f.; and Cancik, *Grundzüge der hethitischen und alttestamentlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, 89, n. 182.

36 Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, 91–93.

37 In one of the Qumran texts, the so-called "Scroll of the Sects," the liturgy has been preserved of a religious group from the time of Jesus which presumably was close to both Jewish and Christian liturgy. As Baltzer has demonstrated, the liturgy corresponds with the ritual of a renewal of the covenant. The priests recapitulate the sacred history:

> Then the priests enumerate the proofs of God's righteousness in his mighty deeds and proclaim his merciful faithfulness to Israel.
> And the Levites enumerate the errors of the Israelites and their guiltful transgressions and sins under the rule of Belial.

Following this historical recapitulation, the covenant is made anew once again. See ibid, 171–73.

38 These are fictions involved here, construed connections and contexts – "poetry" in the sense of Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973). H. Gese made a distinction between "sequence" and "consequence" as history-theoretical connectors. See his "Geschichtliches Denken im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 55 (1958): 127–55. Even the concept of consequence goes too far. Just as "causality" suggests an automatism based on natural law, "consequence" suggests an automatism founded on logic. This is false, as H. Kelsen has shown in his *Vergeltung und Kausalität* (The Hague, 1947).

39 Cf. H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung* (Tübingen, 1968), as well as his "Gerechtigkeit als Thema biblischer

Theologie," (typescript); and J. Assmann, *Maât: L'Egypte pharaonique at l'idée de justice sociale* (Paris, 1989).

40 Aleida Assmann, "Weisheit: Einige Wegmarken in einem weiten Feld," in idem, ed., *Weisheit*, in press.

41 A. Dihle, *Die Goldene Regel* (Göttingen, 1962).

42 See K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia.*

43 A. Falkenstein, "Fluch über Akkade," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 57 (Neue Folge 23) (1965): 70; Albrektson, *History and the Gods*, 25f.; J. S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore and London, 1983).

44 E. Laroche, *Collections des textes hittites*, no. 379; cf. Sürenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge*, 11.

45 Different in Cancik, *Mythische und historische Wahrheit*, 85f.

46 One sphere of application of this formula close to the realm of law is in connection with weights and measures. Here too, the official is admonished: neither add nor detract anything! See R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London, 1985), 31: "I have not diminished the aroura, I have not encroached upon the fields, I have not laid anything upon the weights of the hand-balance, I have not taken anything from the plummet of the standing scales."

47 G. E. Mendelhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, Biblical Colloquium (Pittsburgh, 1955), D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, Analecta Biblica (Rome, 1963), and Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, have demonstrated that the covenant theology of the Israelites is based on the diplomatic practice of alliances between the polities of the ancient Near East. For this practice, see also G. Kestemont, *Diplomatique et droit international en Asie occidentale (1600–1200 av. J.C.)* (Louvain-la-neuve, 1974), and Surenhagen, *Paritätische Staatsverträge.*

48 J. Krasovec, *La justice (sdq) de dieu dans la bible hébraique et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne*, Oriens Biblicus Orientalis, no. 76 (1988). In biblical Hebrew, the notion of "redemptive interventions of God" is expressed by a word meaning "manifestations of justice" or "justices." The history of salvation is the history of God's justice. Cf. also

R. Adamiak, *Justice and History in the Old Testament: The Evolution of Divine Retribution in the Historiographies of the Wilderness Generation* (Cleveland, 1982).

49 This essay does not deal with "historiosophy," as defined by Michael Stone, "Eschatalogie, Remythologisierung und kosmische Aporie," in S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Kulturen der Achsenzeit*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt/Main, 1987), 2:19–37. That notion relates to concepts of macrohistorical sequences such as Hesiodus's conception of the four ages, Daniel's vision of the four empires, Iranian periodization of world time, Joachim de Fiore's theory of the three kingdoms, etc.

33