

Lingjun Kong

Professor Henebry

CGS IN 250

ART PROJECT: Short Story

Dr. Elara Somber, the world-renowned archaeoastronomer, specialized in the deep integration of celestial knowledge into ancient cultures—a field known as cultural astronomy. Her expertise was validated during the major excavations of the Hittite Empire (flourishing in Bronze Age Anatolia), a civilization whose advanced understanding of the cosmos was already respected by modern historians. Yet, even the Hittites' accurate cosmology paled in comparison to the people whose existence she uncovered within their ruins.

Elara's obsession began not in the mountains, but with a piece of cultural documentation preserved on the Hittite temple walls. Stone reliefs depicted foreign emissaries and Hittite nobles kneeling in profound supplication before a group of tall, pale priests—the fictional NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ

The NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ figures were draped in shimmering indigo moon-silk, their necks impossibly elongated, bright with silver bands. What struck Elara most was the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ priests' absolute indifference to the supplicants. Their gazes were held rigidly upward towards the celestial sphere, never downward to the affairs of men.

The accompanying Hittite inscriptions, a mixture of awe and resentment, served as Elara's mandate:

“They do not sleep when the sun walks, nor bow when kings pass. We brought gold, they brought silence. We bent our knees, they bent their gaze to the firmament.”

The final piece of evidence was a fragment of carved obsidian, displaying an anachronistic alignment matching the celestial coordinates of Polaris. This knowledge was thousands of years ahead of Hittite astronomy. Etched on the back was the key: “From the Hollow Star Mountain, where the heavens fall into the earth.” This was the final push toward the impassable Sarran Mountains.

Months later, traversing the high-altitude mist and frost, Elara's team uncovered the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ sanctuary on a remote peak. Their sacred temple was a massive, perfectly cylindrical chamber, carved to serve as both observatory and burial chamber. Its roof was a gaping, circular aperture, precisely aligned to frame Polaris. Rainwater drained into a vast,

natural basin below. It became a flawless, pitch-black reservoir that perpetually mirrored the night sky.

Crucially, there were zero human remains. The NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ had vanished without an earthly trace.

The chamber walls were covered in petroglyphs proving their separation from terrestrial concerns. Elara's analysis confirmed the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ were the first known people to chart a heliocentric model of the solar system.

- They depicted the Earth not as a flat surface, but as a perfect sphere, revolving around Sol, the Golden Lord (the Sun).
- Their carvings illustrated the planets' true elliptical orbits—the Paths of the Seven planets—knowledge thousands of years ahead of any other civilization, including the Hittites.

This astronomical intimacy allowed them to accurately predict the precession of the equinoxes and eclipses, aligning their holy festivals with moments when the “veils between stars and earth grew thin.”

The physical evidence of their devotion was undeniable. The hypothesis of the “deformity” was confirmed. The silver neck-braces were not decorative but sacred skeletal exoskeletons. These were used to deliberately stretch the vertebrae, enforcing the upward, unblinking posture. A self-wrought ritualistic evolution where faith quite literally shaped bone.

Their daily life reflected this cosmic separation: they lived in nocturnal harmony, sleeping by day and waking at dusk. Their offerings were equally detached from the mundane: fragments of meteorite iron (the "fallen words of the sky"), lunar dust, and highly reflective minerals, defining their ritualized astro-science.

In the chamber's center, a platform inlaid with crushed quartz and mica shimmered with liquid starlight. This was their burial site.

The deceased were cremated, their ashes mixed with silver dust, and released into the hollow reservoir below at the rise of the first star. The water became their heaven, eternally reflecting the stars above. As the ashes floated, they appeared to merge with the mirrored night sky. The NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ believed they had not truly died, but had reunited with the stars, joining the cosmos they had devoted their lives to observing.

The final, prophetic inscription was found beneath soot:

“When the Heart of Heaven falls into its reflection, the circle shall close, and the children of the sky shall return to their throne.”

Geological surveys confirmed meteoritic fragments high in nickel and cosmic isotopes were embedded in the reservoir floor. A meteor had struck the peak centuries ago, fulfilling the prophecy: a celestial reunion where heaven and earth became one.

In her report, Dr. Somber concluded:

“The NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ were not merely worshipers of the sky, but a living bridge between the earth and the cosmos. They remind us that faith can become anatomy, and devotion can achieve a profound, scientific intimacy with the universe. They were the first people to truly see themselves as being made of starlight.”

Standing beneath the aperture, Elara realized she stood precisely where the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ had intended: at the shimmering, eternal edge of two worlds.

Artist Statement:

I drew inspiration for this story from my fascination with the divergence of the human belief systems and the unique myths different regions develop. I am particularly interested in how these myths often derive from pragmatic needs. My work is inspired partly by ancient Chinese imperial astronomy. Official government astronomers were charged solely with observing the stars to determine matters of state, from agricultural fortune to military campaigns. Their observations were not abstract but the basis of the empire's continuity and calendar.

My artistic goal was to take this concept further and imagine a culture where astronomical duty is not merely a government mandate but an all-consuming spiritual and physical necessity. This is a religion that is entirely divorced from earthly politics. In this society devotion to the stars dictates daily life, social structure, and even anatomy. The narrative centers on Dr. Elara Somber, a specialist in archaeoastronomy, whose grounded, intellectual perspective provides the audience with an entry point into this extraordinary, speculative world. By using the Hittite Empire as a historical anchor, I created a contrast that emphasizes the extraordinary nature of the fictional NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ. This name, designed to approximate what the Hittites might have called them, roughly translates to "Heavenly Observers," highlighting that their true language and identity remain lost and enigmatic.

The story opens with the visual of the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ priests' absolute indifference to the kneeling Hittite nobles. This image communicates their entire philosophical stance. They are literally and metaphorically above earth power structures. They disregard material wealth and political authority because they believe their true destiny lies in the stars. The contrast between the bowed heads of royalty and the permanently upward gaze of the priests, enforced by silver neck-braces, conveys devotion made corporeal. This choice is designed to spark curiosity illustrating both the cultural and anatomical consequences of faith.

A central aspect of my artistic vision is the idea of devotion as a force capable of shaping the body itself. The silver neck-braces are a deliberate, ritualistic technology: they are not decorative but a tool of self-wrought evolution, gradually extending the vertebrae to maintain the upward gaze. By externalizing internal commitment, this device communicates the extreme lengths to which the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ dedicate themselves to celestial knowledge. Through this choice, I explore the tension between human biology and spiritual aspiration, imagining a society in which belief literally sculpts the form of the body.

The architecture of the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ temple reflects the same priorities. Carved directly into the mountain's core, the chamber's grandeur signals permanence, and its design functions as both a sacred observatory and a communal instrument for studying the heavens. The gaping, circular aperture in the roof frames Polaris with precision, demonstrating a deep understanding of celestial mechanics and creating a visual alignment between architecture and astronomy. The scale of the chamber and its construction emphasize that the greatest communal

effort was devoted not to defense, governance, or earthly concerns, but to the stars. Rainwater collected in a pitch-black reservoir under the chamber that mirrored the night sky. This design choice reflects a literal and metaphorical concept: the temple itself becomes a bridge between heaven and earth, a place where the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ transform mortality into starlight. The reflective water serves as both aesthetic device and narrative tool, reinforcing themes of transmutation, ritual, and astronomical observation.

The final creative decision in the story concerns the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ disappearance, resolved through the ritual of Sky Burial. Their cremated remains, mixed with silver dust and released into reflective reservoir pools, transform into light, merging with the mirrored night sky. This choice connects narrative and artistic concept: it visually and symbolically reinforces the culture's ultimate devotion to the cosmos and provides a spiritually satisfying resolution to the mystery of their absence. The transformation of body into starlight aligns with my goal of integrating astronomical science, myth, and artistic imagination.

In addition to these visual and narrative choices, I aimed to demonstrate the NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ advanced understanding of astronomy. The society is depicted as the first known to chart a heliocentric model, tracking planetary orbits, eclipses, and the precession of the equinoxes. These scientific details are essential to the world-building and thematic structure of the story. By grounding the fiction in plausible astronomical principles, I connect imagination to scientific knowledge, reinforcing both the realism and wonder of the narrative.

Through these choices, I sought to create a work that engages the audience intellectually and emotionally. The NEPISANTIYAŠ AŠŠUŠ embodies the intersection of faith, science, and artistry, demonstrating how devotion can manifest physically, socially, and spiritually. Every detail of their lifestyle reinforces the connection between cosmic knowledge and creative expression. Their nocturnal habits, offerings and their Sky Burials in a reservoir of reflective water all visualize a culture governed by the rhythms of the cosmos. The ashes, floating eternally in the mirrored reservoir, allowed me to explore themes of immortality, transmutation, and the poetic embodiment of starlight. These choices were designed to connect the audience emotionally and conceptually to the intersection of science and spirituality.

Ultimately, my goal was to craft a narrative that is both scientifically informed and aesthetically compelling, offering a vision of a culture where astronomy is not merely observed but lived in every breath, posture, and ritual. By merging historical research, astronomical accuracy, and imaginative storytelling, I aim to show how the study of the stars can inspire both wonder and reflection, bridging the gap between human experience and the infinite universe.