Theonyms, Panthea and Syncretisms in Hittite Anatolia and Northern Syria

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Front cover image: *Çağdın stele of the Storm-god*, Museo di Adana © Alvise Domenico Matessi

"May the Thousand Gods give you life!"
HKM 81: 5

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Introduction

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> Anatolian religions of the second millennium BC never constituted an isolated system which could be attributed to specific ethnic group. From the very beginning we are confronted with different religious traditions in a multiethnic society, which resulted in equations or translatability of deities from different cultural milieus.

With this statement Taracha (2010, 858) concisely underlined the state of the Hittite religion as a peculiar melting pot derived from several cultural traditions. From the Middle Bronze Age onwards, Hattian, Hittite, Palaean, and Luwian gods have been worshiped in the Kingdom of Ḫatti, while Hurro-Syrian influence was already present in East Anatolia. At the same time, local beliefs continued to exist in the peripheries where a solid traditionalism was being kept alive within the local religious practice. In this context, I will first of all outline the state of art of the researches.

The first fundamental separation to take into account depends on chronology. From a methodological point of view, this is an essential aspect, but it is still limited to various reconstructions for specific different periods. This issue is very clear when we consider Popko's and Taracha's reconstructions of the Hittite Anatolian religious system. Popko (1995) provided a chronological classification based on: Old Assyrian period; Old Hittite period (when there were apparently only Hattian beliefs); Middle Hittite period (when an official pantheon emerged in which Hurrian, Luwian and Hittite beliefs co-existed)[1]; and Empire period (when a state religion was finally established). The basis for such a partition is represented by the divine witnesses in the Hittite State treaties. According to Popko (1995, 90), in those treaties the divine witnesses are listed in an order determined by certain set principles in relation to the official pantheon of the Middle Hittite period[2]. According to his analysis, around the reign of King Arnuwanda I and Queen Ašmunikal the canon of the state pantheon was similar to the one that appears in the later treaties.

Conversely, Taracha identified two macro religious periods: an Old Hittite period, when Hattian influence was dominant around the cities of Ḫattuša and Arinna (then con-

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[1]   See also Beckman 2004, 309b-311b.

[2]   See also Gurney 1977, 6; 15; Beckman 2004, 311b; Taracha 2009, 82-3; Steitler 2017, 19.

solidated in the Kızılırmak basin: cities of Ankuwa, Katapa, Zippalanda); and an Empire period, when different beliefs (Hattian, Hittite, Luwian, Palaean, Hurrian) contributed to create the so-called "State pantheon/religion"[3]. For Gurney (1977, 4) this «pantheon developed from simple beginnings into a highly complex system through and increasing tendency to gather in the local cults»[4]. Moreover, Taracha (2009, 84-95) posits the existence of two panthea during the Empire Period: the State pantheon and the so-called Dynastic (Hurrian) pantheon of the kingship, where for instance: «The efforts of the court theologians to find reference between the state and dynastic panthea led to attempts to equate the Sun-goddess of Arinna and Teššub's consort Ḫebat» (Taracha 2009, 91)[5].

For both Popko and Taracha the state religion and the dynastic pantheon increasingly overlapped ever since the time of the introduction of the Hurrian influence in the Hittite capital[6] from the first Tudḫaliya, through the time of Puduḫepa's interventions, until the so-called "re-organisation" of the cults by Tudḫaliya IV[7]. This kind of evolution is more common in the polytheistic religions because polytheism «precludes religious dogma and orthodoxy, and the religion promoted by and for the Hittite ruling elite reflects the expansiveness inherent in such a system even as it accommodated reforms initiated by individual kings to promote favored cults» (Collins 2007, 158). Collins's statement is not only valid with respect to Tudḫaliya's re-organisation, but also in order to clarify that we cannot photograph the pantheon as a fixed structure throughout the entire Hittite history, but it should be contextualized in its various periods and locations[8]. For this reason, the reference to the "Hittite pantheon" is highly significant to better understand both the limits within which we are working, and the geographical and cultural contextualization.

A second important classification concerns the arrangements by divine typology, which ware crucial in Haas's (1994) approach to the Anatolian religion. Deities can be divided into Storm-gods ([D]U), Sun-deities ([D]UTU, both male and female), Mother-goddesses, Tutelary gods ([D]LAMMA), Moon-gods ([D]30), Underworld gods, or other lesser

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[3] Gurney 1977, 1; 4 *passim*; Beckman 2004, 313a-b; Taracha 2009, 38; 42; 80 *passim*.

[4] Similarly, for Taracha (2009, 38) the State pantheon «included gods worshiped in Ḫattuša and divinities heading the local panthea from the most important religious centers of the state». See also Cammarosano 2018, 51.

[5] Taracha, as well as Cammarosano (2018, 51-2) and Rutherford (2021, 176), refers to the Puduḫepa's prayer KUB 21.27 I 3-6: «Sun-goddess of Arinna, my lady, you are the queen of all lands! In the land of Ḫatti you have assumed the name Sun-goddess of Arinna, but in respect to the land that you have made that of cedars, you have assumed the name Ḫebat» (translation by Beckman 2004, 209b). See also Gurney 1977, 18; Gilan 2019, 180; and Hutter 2021, 29; 192.

[6] Popko 1995, 112; Taracha 2009, 53-4. See also White 1993, 362; 367-68; Archi 2004, 15; and Hutter 2021, 29; 192.

[7] As well underlined in the present volume by Archi and Cammarosano, the Tudḫaliya IV's textual evidence proves that Hittites «proceeded rather systematically, region after region in registering the cults of each city and village, in order to verify that the rites were celebrated at the right date and in the right form. It was essentially "une œuvre de restauration des cultes".» (Archi, present volume § 10). For this reason, firstly Goetze (1933, 159-60 with note 1; 1957, 169 with note 13) suggested the idea of a "Kultreorganisation", which has been reinterpreted as "réforme religiose" by Laroche (1975 = 2016, 455-58). Today, however, a «more nuanced standpoint in Houwink ten Cate's study (1992), which stressed how the king's measures mentioned in these texts consisted of restorations and expansions rather than innovation of cults, and that their innovative character may perhaps have laid in the geographical scope and fervor of the operation» (Cammarosano present volume § 1.1). See also Hazenbos 2003, 11-13; Archi 2006, 150-53; Collins 2007, 177; Taracha 2009, 133; Cammarosano 2018, 22-3; 26-7; Hutter 2021, 30-1; 193-94; 201; 236.

[8] See Cammarosano 2018, 51.

deities according to their typology[9]. This subdivision enabled analysis of Hittite gods in a more comprehensive way, but even it shows methodological limitations. First, behind a single logogram (e.g., ^{D}U, ^{D}UTU) we can recognize several divine entities[10] with different features and sometimes even different genders[11]. Second, the differentiation between typological and geographical groups is often quite confusing. Third, this typological categorization heavily implies a fluctuation among the values of the single god, which changed over the historical evolution of the Hittite periods.

Another possible categorization of the Hittite religious system is based on geography. Gods or cultural influences can be distinguished by geographical areas within Anatolia (e.g., West, Central-core, East, South-East)[12]. For instance, Hutter (2003, 213-14) pointed out how there were three different "Luwian zones": the proper Luwian religion in the West (Arzawa); the "Hittite" Luwian area in the Lower Land; and the "Kizzuwatnean" Luwian area, where the cultural interactions (with Syrio-Hurrian contacts) were more marked[13]. However, it should never be forgotten that any geographical categorization should be contextualized: what we know about the Luwians derives from Hittite scribal practice and this does not always allow us to connect the Luwian language to a territory during a specific phase, because, when dealing with Pre-Classical Anatolia, we are dealing with a multi-ethnic society since a very early stage[14].

Within macro-subdivision, we must then distinguish smaller regions, such as those interested by the so-called "Local Cults"[15], whose analysis owes much to the Cammarosano's recent works (2018, 2021). Particularly, according to Rutherford (2020, 185-86) «While the Hittite state pantheon was huge, local pantheons are different. [...] (in a) Hittite town, you tend to find a simpler structure, with a top-tier, comprising a storm god and either a sun deity or a mother goddess; a "tutelary deity" or deities, [...] sometimes a god of war, and various local deities associated with mountains, rivers, and/or springs».

However, this local structure was only apparently simpler because local cults were often not culturally homogeneous regarding both the cult practice and the worshiped deities. Therefore, a question arises: how do we deal with theonomies with different etymologies within the same local cult?[16] We have to be careful in our definitions concerning socio-linguistic dynamics, as Cammarosano (2021, 76-94) recently points out, categorizing local panthea both according to their "milieu" (Hattian, Luwian, Palaean, Hurrian), and according to their "geographical sectors" (northern, central and southern districts). Furthermore, the analysis of Local Cults must be based on sources, the cult inventories, which «deal with certain deities in relation to one or more specific towns» that is, they

[9] Haas (1994, 315-466): from "Die überregionale Gottheiten" to the "Gottheiten der Vegetation", "die Schutzgottheiten" and "weitere Naturgottheiten". See also Hutter 2003, 220-32; Steitler 2017, 18-20; Cammarosano 2018, 53.

[10] Popko (1995, 68) «It should be made clear that we are dealing here with a name [i.e. ^{D}U] of a singular god, but with a general term used to refer to the chief deity of the country as well as to the local storm-gods who could easily have had another name or epithet in addition».

[11] The emblematic case is the Sun-goddess of Arinna as mother goddess and the Sun-god of Heaven, both hidden under the logogram ^{D}UTU. See Beckman 2004, 310b; Steitler 2017, 5.

[12] See Cammarosano 2018, 53.

[13] See also Gurney 1977, 16; and Yakubovich 2010, 86-117; 239-45; 272-85.

[14] See Hutter 2003, 212; 215; Taracha 2009, 39; Yakubovich 2010, 86-96; Giusfredi 2020, 14-15.

[15] Gurney 1977, 1; 4. Also "Stadtpanthea" (Haas 1994, 539) or "Local pantheons" (Beckman 2004, 313b).

[16] For instance, the several deities worshiped at Kummani during the (ḫ)išuwa festival includes Maliya and Kubaba. See Hutter 2021, 169-70; and Warbinek and Giusfredi (forthcoming).

«are arranged by town(s) and not by festival(s)» (Cammarosano 2021, 5)[17]. The type of evidence at our disposal affects the picture we reconstruct. According to Bryce (1986, 172-73), «our knowledge of the roles and functions of the various deities is confined largely to the information provided by the [(evidence)] in which gods and/or goddesses are commonly assigned a role», but still we can «identify with reasonable certainty the deities who appear to have been most prominent [(in a place)], on the basis of the frequency with which their names occur in the [(texts)], the extent of the distribution of their cult centres throughout the country», however, «a particular deity may have been worshipped in several different centres, but in each centre he or she was regarded as belonging specifically to that centre or to the district in which the centre was located».

Another important limitation concerns the very presence of different religious centres and traditions in Bronze Age Anatolia, whereas our knowledge of the Hittite religion comes primarily from the capital. In this regard, Cammarosano (2021, 33) underlines a proper methodological perspective: «it follows that recognizing a given text as a cult inventory does not automatically mean that all information contained in the text pertains to a well-defined, limited territory», and above all:

> The local panthea as reflected in the corpus of the cult inventories are the result of complex processes of religious convergence, evolution, and adaptation, also involving dynamics of centre-periphery interaction, scholarly reception, and scribal systematization. […] Whether a god is 'Hittite', 'Hattian' or 'Luwian' is of course a matter of interpretation. Such a classification often relies solely on a linguistic analysis of the theonym, and further, the available textual evidence is necessarily filtered through the lens of the Hittite scribal bureaucracy. […] The resulting picture is one of interplay between evolving local traditions and religious influences both 'from below' (e.g., through religious habits of incoming population groups) and 'from above' (e.g., through the action of the king or as an effect of theological systematizations). Mutual influences between different sectors of the society and population groups work at multiple levels. (Cammarosano 2021, 63)

Hence, we have to bear in mind that the gods worshiped in Hittite Anatolia should be considered «from different perspectives, depending on whether the focus is on their typology, geographical areas of attestation, or cultural milieu» (Cammarosano 2021, 94). However, despite these limitations, the subdivision into Local Cults offers the objective advantage of being faithful to the sources, which are mainly descriptions of religious festivals and lists of witnessing gods in the Hittite state treaties. In both these types of documents, the sequence of offerings and the sequence of gods were never arbitrary or fortuitous; rather they reflected a divine hierarchy[18]. However, «it should be kept in mind that the texts refer to particular festivals celebrated in the capital or another religious center. Therefore, if a deity is missing from a list […] it may indicate only that this deity was not taking part in this ceremony because the center of her cult was situated far from the capital» (Taracha 2010, 863). This scenario clearly shows how careful we must be with the nature of the sources, the gods' features, and the reconstruction of the festivals based on these texts, because they are never a protocol of specific events, but rather a set of instructions for the organizers.

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[17]   See also Gurney 1977, 25; and Cammarosano in the present volume § 1.1.
[18]   Gurney 1977, 4-5; Archi 1993, 7; Popko 1995, 90; Schwemer 2008, 139; Taracha 2009, 39; 82-3; Taracha 2010, 861. See also Warbinek § 2 in the present volume.

Therefore, the Hittite kingdom collected deities and panthea of different origins in a unique – and quite peculiar – melting pot. The historical process connected with the Hittite religion makes all attempts to define this religious system quite challenging. This leads to some general questions: what does "pantheon" really mean in the context of the Hittite kingdom?[19] Can we deal with a pantheon, or is it better to recognize different panthea, or cults? How can we define them? Which were their boundaries? Were syncretistic processes a bridge among those groups? Is it correct to speak of a "State Pantheon" or is it better to only discuss the "State Cult"[20]?

Concerning the TeAI project, we decided to remain faithful to the texts by avoiding any not-shared definition like "State Pantheon". The Hittites named their religious system: the "Thousand gods of Ḫatti"[21]. According to Collins (2007, 173) «Their expansive pantheon was a point of pride for the Hittites, and they invoked them collectively in blessings and as witnesses in their treaties. The actual number of deities attested in the surviving Hittite documents has not yet reached the canonical one thousand, but the number was hardly an exaggeration». Within this congregation of the "Thousand Gods of Ḫatti" the different ethnic groups of the Hittite kingdom coexisted: Hattian, Hittite, Palaean, Luwian, and Hurrian. The allocation of each deity to her proper cultural milieu is a difficult task. Sometimes the classification does not raise any major doubts (e.g., Hurrian Teššub, Hattian Taru), whereas some cases are harder to unravel (e.g., Kamrušepa[22]).

Lastly and more importantly, we can hardly speak of "Hittite pantheon" because this definition does not identify the pure Hittite system, but rather the religion of the Hittite kingdom in all of its cultural and ethnic components in which several deities have come into contact with different modes of interaction[23]: from the confluence of some divine elements, to the divine identification of gods or even the syncretic creation of a new composite god. This is because the «tendency of Hittite religion was […] to accommodate deities from other cultures» (Rutherford 2020, 28). Indeed, when different religious traditions came into contact, several possibilities of interaction between divine figures may occur. According to Assmann (1996, 33-6) these interactions are:

1. *assimilation*: the addition of a foreign god to a religious system;
2. *syncretism*: the creation of a new god within a common milieu;
3. *translation*:
    a) "syncretic translation" into a different linguistic and cultural system;
    b) "assimilatory translation" into a more prestigious linguistic and cultural system;
    c) "mutual translation" in a network of mutual cultural interactions.

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[19] See for a discussion Beckman 2004.

[20] See Beckman 2004, 308a; Taracha 2009, 38 *passim*; Hutter 2003, 230 *passim*; 2013, 177 *passim*; 2021, 186-89. In the present volume, Cammarosano § 1.1, note 13: «the concept of "state cult" is frequently used in Hittitological literature, and is regularly connected to the participation of the king in the rites […]; it is also explicitly used in opposition to cults considered have a "local" character without being embedded in the "state cult", see most recently Hutter 2021, 96-7; 232-33, and *passim*, who stresses that it is sometimes difficult to attribute a festival to one or the other class».

[21] Gurney 1977, 4; Taracha 2009, 38; Cammarosano 2018, 51. For the attestation of ""*LIM DINGIR*ᴹᴱˢ *ŠA KUR* ᵁᴿᵁ*Ḫatti*" see van Gessel 1998, 978-79 or, for instance, KBo 4.10++ I 48-49: van den Hout 1995, 38-9; and HKM 81, 5: Collins 2007, 173.

[22] Warbinek 2022, 6; 9-10.

[23] Here we are not dealing with godnapping, *evocatio*, and military expansion, which are, according to Schwemer 2008, the three possible historical situations for a foreign god to became part of the Hittite religious system.

Differently, Rutherford (2020, 77) identifies:

1. *No influence*: when no interactions appear to have existed;
2. *Borrowing*: the "adoption by one group of one or more of the other group's gods";
3. *Identification*: the translation of "one or more of their deities with the deities of the other group";
4. *Syncretism*: the "process of creating a composite deity".

The difference between these models depends both on the theological approaches and to which cultures they apply[24]. Generally speaking, for Hittite Anatolia, a «deity could become common in a new cultural milieu where she had no counterpart and it was common then for her to be venerated in this new ethnic environment under her old name» (Taracha 2010, 861). Nonetheless, it is possible to explores the question further by separating the theological and linguistic issues as follows (Table 1).

Tab. 1: The equation question between cultures according to different perspectives.

CORRELATED CULTURES	DIFFERENT CULTURES	
	Theological perspective	Linguistic perspective
CONVERGENCE (**A**) = mutual contamination between two correlated or overlapping cultures	TRANSLATION (**B**) (*interpretatio*)	Linguistic absorption
	ADOPTION (**1**) of a foreign deity (no native deity)	Theonym Borrowing, Calque, or Periphrasis
	ADOPTION (**2**) of a foreign god (with a native deity):	(**2a**) CALQUE or PERIPHRASIS creation of a hypostasis
	PARTIAL SYNCRETISM = functional overlapping FULL SYNCRETISM = creation of a composite god	(**2b**) BORROWING (e.g., Ḫebat-Arinna as Queen of the gods Vs. Tarḫunt-Teššub)

In the previous literature, the different phenomena of borrowing, assimilation, and syncretism of deities are mostly dealt with from a theological perspective. However, our projects are mostly focused on the linguistic aspects of cultural interaction, so we decided to address this issue from a linguistic point of view, by referring to the technical distinctions between different phenomena of lexical interference, such as loanwords and loan translations (or calques). Of course, the purely linguistic point of view cannot be the only one employed, because we are not merely dealing with linguistic signs, but also their referents – i.e., the extra-linguistic reality – should also be taken into account.

Once these points are established, we can separate the contacts of two correlated cultures (e.g., Hattian and Hittite) and of two different cultures (e.g., Hittite and Hurrian): the first case leads to *convergence* (A), where the equation of deities involves the mutual contamination between overlapping cultures (e.g., Tarḫunt-Taru, Ḫalki-Kait)[25]; whereas when the convergence involves two completely different cultures, a foreign deity could be linguistically absorbed and theologically translated (Classic *interpretatio*)[26]

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[24] See Cammarosano 2018, 51.

[25] See Cammarosano 2018, 52.

[26] See for instance the case of Inar(a)-Ḫabantali in Archi 2004, 13-4 with references.

and transferred on a new realm (B). Moreover, the deities of two different cultures can be equated as follows:

1. No native deity is involved, so no assimilation strategies are expected to occur. In this sense, a foreign deity is simply borrowed from a given culture and transferred on a native realm. Linguistically, this adoption of the foreign deity may occur through a theonym borrowing, calque or periphrasis.

2. The target culture already has a deity that can be equated with the adopted foreign deity:

    a) When the foreign god partly corresponds to the native one, the typical linguistic strategy could be a calque, or loan translation, or a periphrasis. Typically, the result is the creation of a hypostasis of the native deity (see, for instance, the different Ištars in Barsacchi's paper in this volume);

    b) When the adoption includes all of the functions of the original deity, we are faced with *syncretism*. The linguistic process is, in general, a proper *borrowing* of the theonym, although sometimes the scenarios may be more complex and involved overlapping that preserve some degree of distinction (think of the superposition of Ḫebat and the Sun-goddess of Arinna as Queen of the gods).

Therefore, in order to accommodate new gods into the world of the Thousand Gods of Ḫatti the religious tendency in Ḫattuša was not syncretic; rather, it was assimilatory[27]:

> The pantheon in its final form evolved through a process of territorial expansion and assimilation, over time absorbing the gods of the Hattians, Palaians, and the Luwians. Eventually the expansion of the Hittite state resulted in the introduction of gods not only from other parts of Anatolia but also from Hurrian Syria and Mesopotamia. The size of the Hittite pantheon may be attributed to a resistance to syncretism, since in general the Hittites tended not to identify their own gods with either foreign or native deities of a similar type, in the way, for example, that members of the Greek pantheon were identified with those of the Roman. Scribes brought a certain order to the system by grouping together local deities who showed a common character (Collins 2007, 173).

However, a new question arises: «can we distinguish any religious elements distinctive of the Hittite elite before they arrived in Kanesh? […] Thus, the religion of Anatolia in the 14th-13th century is a patchwork made up of several major traditions and many subtraditions, corresponding to micro-traditions and important towns. At the same time, these cultures had been in contact for many centuries, and there had been a degree of internal diffusion. […] there was a degree of "Pan-hittite" standardization, as we see from the local cult inventories» (Rutherford 2020, 28). This patchwork prevents us from being able to «provide any sort of comprehensive view of the religious cults […], due to the nature of the evidence that is available», however, «this does not mean that one should necessarily view [(Hittite)] religion as in any way organized or systematized on a country-wide basis. Though there was a degree of cultural and political unity […], one must not assume that this means the same deities would be honoured throughout the land» (Keen 1998, 193-94).

This leads to a final consideration. Whatever the correct solution to the methodological issue of Anatolian panthea and cults, all those gods can be described as belonging to the cultural milieu of Hittite Anatolia, and their names do not all stem from

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[27]   Archi 1993, 3; 6; Hutter 2003, 217; Archi 2004, 13; Cammarosano 2018, 51; Rutherford 2020, 28. *Contra* the very syncretistic perspective of Gurney 1977, 18; Popko 1995, 117; Beckman 2004, 308b; 309b.

a single language. This makes it possible to track some changes and some elements of continuity, but also to identify some spheres of interference as well as a certain degree local differentiation. There are, as we have seen, many questions to answer and several views to combine in order to achieve a general agreement on the proper definition of an Anatolian religious system. What we can agree upon, is that the "Thousand Gods of Ḫatti" were in all likelihood an inclusive religious system, that defined itself through the principle of territoriality rather than that of a cultural or linguistic (pre)dominance over the kingdom.

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