



Kultur – Kontakt – Kultur

Beiträge anlässlich

der 66. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
in Frankfurt/Main und Mainz, 25.–29. Juli 2022

Herausgegeben von Doris Prechel,
Alexander Pruß, Thomas Richter und
Dirk Wicke unter Mitarbeit von Michael Würz

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Altorientalistische Publikationen
Publications on the Ancient Near East

Band 35

Herausgegeben von Kristin Kleber und Kai A. Metzler

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Münster

2025

Illustration auf dem Cover: Motiv des Kongresses,
nach Entwurf von Andrea Vögeling.

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ISBN 978-3-96327-288-2 (Buch)

ISBN 978-3-96327-289-9 (E-Book)

ISSN 2627-7174



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Borrowing, Translation, and Syncretism of Deities in Ancient Anatolia*

Livio Warbinek & Valerio Pisaniello

Abstract

When different cultures come into contact, interactions between the respective religions and cultic practices may also occur, which can result in the attempt to equalize deities belonging to the respective cultural milieus. Taking into account a number of important contributions dealing with contacts between religious systems from a more or less broad perspective, in our paper we will first critically reconsider the classificatory models suggested for the possible types of interaction between deities belonging to different cultures, in order to establish a new and improved classification. Subsequently, we will try to determine which phenomena of interaction involving different deities and panthea were at work in the ancient Anatolian area, providing relevant examples from both the cultures of the Bronze Age and those of the Iron Age.

1. The Thousand Gods

In the field of Anatolian religion of the 2nd millennium BC, the Hittites built up a quite peculiar religious structure, the so-called “Thousand Gods of Ḫatti”,¹ which “never constituted an isolated system” but rather included “different religious traditions in a multiethnic society, which resulted in equations or translatability of deities from different cultural milieus” (Taracha 2010, 858). This paper aims to discuss those equations among Anatolian deities, given the fact that, from the Middle Bronze Age onwards, Hattian, Luwian, Hittite, and Palaic gods have been worshipped in the Kingdom of Ḫatti while a solid traditionalism was being kept alive in the peripheries within the local religious practice. Moreover, Hurrian influence increased in Ḫattuša² starting from Tudḫaliya I, continuing with

* L. Warbinek’s research is a result of the project TeAI “Teonimi e pantheon nell’Anatolia Ittita”, funded by the Italian Ministry of University, F.A.R.E. programme. V. Pisaniello’s research is a result of the project PALaC, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement No 757299). Although the contents of the paper have been broadly discussed by the two authors, L. Warbinek authored sections 1 and 2; V. Pisaniello authored sections 3 and 4; both authors take joint responsibility for section 5.

¹ Gurney 1977, 4; Taracha 2009, 38; Cammarosano 2018, 51. For the attestation of *LĪM DINGIR*^{MEŠ} *ŠA KUR*^{URU} *Ḫatti* see van Gessel 1998, 978–979. Examples include KBo 4.10++ i 48–49 (van den Hout 1995, 38–39) and HKM 81, 5 (Collins 2007, 173).

² Popko 1995, 112; Taracha 2009, 53–54. See also Archi 2004, 15, and Hutter 2021, 29,

Puduḫepa's interventions under the reign of Ḫattušili III, up to the so-called "re-organisation"³ of the cults by Tudḫaliya IV.

However, it should be borne in mind that any cultural categorization must be contextualized: what we know about, e.g., the Luwians or Hattians derives from the Hittite texts and so our knowledge of anything concerning these cultures is necessarily filtered through the unique and quite peculiar Hittite melting pot in which several cultural traditions coexisted.⁴ Within this wider context, the process of creation of the Thousand Gods has evolved according to several opportunities for interaction among cultures, thus developing a complex religious system which necessitates further consideration.

2. Introducing the Bronze Age Anatolian Interactions

Within this congregation of the Thousand Gods of Ḫatti, the different ethnic groups of the Hittite Kingdom mingled for centuries during the 2nd millennium BC. Today, the allocation of each deity to his/her proper cultural milieu is quite difficult, because the historical process connected with the creation of the Hittite religion challenges attempts to analyze this system: some cases give no doubts (e.g., Teššub was Hurrian, Taru was Hattian, etc.), whereas other cases are harder to unravel (e.g., Kamrušepa, whose etymology is not assured⁵). What we want to stress is that most of the attempts to define the Hittite religious system have been based on linguistic criteria.⁶

This methodological issue concerns the ways of identifying the Anatolian panthea. For instance, Klinger (1996) stressed the focus on the so-called *Kultschichten* of the Hittite religion to show how inconsistent is any attempt to define "pantheon" a list or a group of theonyms only because those gods seem to bear names with a common linguistic milieu. In other words, might the existence of a pantheon be proved only by gathering gods with linguistically related morphemes in their names? Furthermore, because "Language is not ethnicity" (Hutter 2003, 211), how should we deal with the "amalgam of Anatolian, Hurrian, Syrian and

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³ Firstly Goetze (1933, 159–160 with note 1) suggested the idea of a "Kultreorganisation", which has been reinterpreted as "réforme religieuse" by Laroche (1975). Today, however, scholars prefer to see a restoration of the cult, rather than a whole innovation, thanks to the administrative scope of the Tudḫaliya IV's textual evidence. See Hazenbos 2003, 11–13; Archi 2006, 150–153; Collins 2007, 177; Taracha 2009, 133; Cammarosano 2018, 22–27; Hutter 2021, 30–31, 193–194, 201, 236.

⁴ See Hutter 2003, 212, 215; Taracha 2009, 39; Yakubovich 2010, 86–96; Giusfredi 2020, 14–15.

⁵ See Warbinek 2022, 6, 9–10.

⁶ Laroche's (1946/47) subdivision into gods of different origins hides linguistic criteria. See also Gurney 1977, 7–16; van Gessel 1998, (Part I) X; Hutter 2003, 218–120; Beckman 2004, 311a-b; Taracha 2009, 107–108.

Mesopotamian religious traditions” (Taracha 2009, 86) which shaped the Hittite religion?

In our opinion, we should avoid any generic definition of “pantheon” for the Hittite Kingdom because what we have is a whole religious system of divine names in different languages. For instance, a Hurrian pantheon certainly existed for itself, but what was imported and adopted in Ḫattuša cannot be addressed as a pantheon. Similarly, there was no official Luwian pantheon in the Hittite Kingdom, but only individual Luwian deities worshipped together with gods of different origin in the State Cult.⁷ For what concerns a possible Palaic pantheon, the situation is even more complicated: the corpus of Palaic texts specifically describes the festival for Ziparwa and the Palaic cult, but it is not enough to identify it as “pantheon” until we outline the Palaic religious system with certainty.⁸ At the same time, we can hardly speak of a “Hittite pantheon” to refer to the group of deities with a clear Hittite etymology because this definition does not identify that 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: from the confluence of some divine elements, to the divine identification of gods, or even the syncretic creation of new composite gods, because the “tendency of Hittite religion was thus to accommodate deities from other cultures” (Rutherford 2020, 28). In conclusion, our opinion is that any study of a pantheon should always include both the etymology of the related gods, the criteria of cult language in which a deity was addressed, and the contexts in which the deities are grouped, worshipped, and equated.⁹

According to Schwemer (2008), Hittites could annex foreign gods in three different ways: integration through *godnapping*, a theological technique typical of the Old Hittite period; incorporation through *evocatio*; inclusion through military expansion. In this context, a foreign deity could become common in a new cultural milieu through different levels of religious interaction, depending on whether or not it had a counterpart in the adoptive environment. According to Assmann (1996, 33–36) these interactions are:

1. *assimilation*: the progressive addition of a god to another religious system.
2. *syncretism*: the creation of a new god in a common world.
3. *translation*:
 - a) “syncretic translation” into a third language/culture;
 - b) “assimilatory translation” into a dominating language/culture;
 - c) “mutual translation” within a network of cultural exchanges.

⁷ Cf., e.g., Taracha 2009, 107.

⁸ For an outline of the beliefs of the Palaeans see Archi 1993, 5–6; Taracha 2009, 58–59.

⁹ Goetze 1953, 263; Archi 2004, 11; Taracha 2009, 36; Taracha 2010, 859.

Differently, Rutherford (2020, 77) identifies:

1. *no influence*: when there are no traces of interactions.
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”.

Different theological approaches and related cultures characterize these two models.¹⁰ Particularly concerning 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). 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.¹¹ For instance, when Taracha (2009, 84–95) puts forward the existence of two panthea in the Empire Period – the State pantheon and the so-called Dynastic (Hurrian) pantheon of the kingship – he underlines that the “efforts of the court theologians to find reference between the state and dynastic pantheons led to attempts to equate the Sun-goddess of Arinna and Teššub’s consort Ḫebat” (Taracha 2009, 91).¹²

Considering the primary linguistic focus of both PALaC and TeAI projects, in the following sections we will offer a new model for the analysis of these phenomena of cultural interactions involving panthea combining the linguistic aspects with the theological processes.

3. Between Theology and Linguistics: An Integrated Model for Classifying Religious Interactions

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. Of course, it cannot be a purely linguistic point of view, because we are not merely dealing with linguistic signs – i.e., the theonyms – but also their referents – i.e., the deities,

¹⁰ See Cammarosano 2018, 51.

¹¹ Archi 1993, 3; 6; Hutter 2003, 217; Archi 2004, 13; Collins 2007, 173; Cammarosano 2018, 51; Rutherford 2020, 28. *Contra* the very syncretistic perspective of Gurney 1977, 18; Popko 1995, 117; Beckman 2004, 308b; 309b.

¹² Taracha, as well as Cammarosano (2018, 51–52) 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, 309b). See also Gurney 1977, 18; Gilan 2019, 180; and Hutter 2021, 29, 192.

which belong to the extra-linguistic reality.

Therefore, we would like to present a new tentative classification of these phenomena of cultural interactions primarily focusing on the linguistic dimension, also because language is probably the most prominent dimension that allows us to see these processes in the case of interaction between extinct cultures.¹³ However, the linguistic aspects will be also combined with the extra-linguistic dimension in a single comprehensive model.

As is well-known, linguistics has a solid conceptual framework for classifying the different phenomena of lexical interference between any given model and any given target language. Although several fine-grained models have been suggested, for the present research we can be happy with a very basic distinction between loanwords (or borrowings, from the point of view of the target language) and calques (also called loan translations), which differ from each other with respect to the type of material of the model language that is copied by the target language.

The borrowing process involves the copy of a whole linguistic sign: employing the terminology established by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), both the *signifiant* (the “acoustic image”) and the *signifié* (roughly speaking, the meaning). Of course, the process may involve modifications on both levels: the *signifiant* may be phonologically and morphologically adapted to the structures of the target language; the *signifié* may undergo some semantic change (narrowing, broadening, etc.).¹⁴

Conversely, a calque only involves the copy of a *signifié*, which comes to be associated, in the target language, with a linguistically-native *signifiant*, which can either already exist (in this case, we speak of a semantic calque), or be purposely built by reproducing the deep structure of the model linguistic sign (i.e., a structural calque).

This very basic distinction between two macro-categories of lexical interference is, in our opinion, very helpful for a classification of the cultural interaction phenomena involving divine names.

This was the linguistic part of the model, which is necessary to classify the different phenomena involving the theonyms. As far as the referents of the theonyms are concerned, i.e., the deities, two aspects are relevant in our opinion. If, for the sake of simplicity, we choose to take into account the interaction between only two cultures – and thus only two panthea – and to consider the adoption of a

¹³ Of course, language is not the only access key in the acknowledgement of such dynamics: iconography, e.g., may also reveal cultural interactions, syncretistic processes, etc. However, we believe that linguistic data may have a major role in the study of such interactions.

¹⁴ The bibliography on the different phenomena of lexical interference is massive. For a general overview and further references, one may refer to Cotticelli Kurras 2007, 95–96 (s.v. *calco*), 380–381 (s.v. *interferenza*), 617–618 (s.v. *prestito*).

deity from the model culture by the target culture, the relevant issues can be summarized by the following questions:

1. Does the target culture have a deity that may somehow correspond to the deity of the model culture that it is transferring to its own pantheon?
2. If it does, to what extent may the native deity correspond to the foreign deity?
3. Which assimilation strategies occur in the process of equating the foreign deity with the somehow corresponding native one?

By combining the linguistic processes with the non-linguistic aspects of the interactions between panthea, we suggest the classification summarized in Table 1. Starting from the first column, in a scenario of cultural contact involving the adoption of foreign deities of a given model culture by a given target culture, we may have three possible initial conditions from the point of view of the target culture:

- 1) In quite simplistic terms, the target culture does not have a deity that may functionally correspond to the deity of the model culture. Of course, it is not necessarily a matter of an actual lack of a suitable deity, but it could rather have to do, for example, with the perception of the differences between the foreign deity and the native deities potentially eligible for its functions. So, we include here all those cases in which we observe the emergence of a foreign deity in the pantheon of a given culture, without any evidence for an equation with a deity already existing in it.
- 2) The target culture has a deity that, in general, may correspond to the deity of the model culture, but has a more limited scope, so that its properties cannot fully include those of the foreign deity.
- 3) The target culture has a deity that may fully include the functions of the deity of the model culture.

Starting from any of the three initial scenarios, the target culture adopts a deity of the model culture. The second column thus introduces the linguistic aspects of the adoption process.

In the first scenario, in which a given culture does not have a corresponding deity, the adoption process may involve either the borrowing of the theonym or its reproduction through linguistic material belonging to the language of the target culture. The latter may be realized through a calque of the model theonym or the creation of a periphrasis describing some relevant feature of the foreign deity regardless of the original theonym.

In the second scenario, the target culture already has a possible corresponding deity, who, however, can only partly be equated with the foreign deity adopted, who has a broader scope. In this case, the most typical linguistic strategy could be a calque or a periphrasis in which the native theonym referring to the correspond-

ing deity is combined with a modifier that provides information on some relevant features of the deity.

Initial condition	Process involving the linguistic sign (theonym)	Assimilation strategy to the native deity
1) A given target culture does not have a deity that may functionally correspond to a given deity of the model culture.	borrowing	<i>none</i>
	calque or periphrasis	<i>none</i>
2) A given target culture has a deity that may only partly correspond to a given deity of the model culture.	calque or periphrasis	creation of a hypostasis
3) A given target culture has a deity that may fully include the functions of a given deity of the model culture.	borrowing	complete functional overlapping = full syncretism
		partial functional overlapping = partial syncretism
	calque	absorption

Tab. 1. An integrated linguistic-theological model for classifying cultural interactions between panthea.

In the third scenario, in which the target culture has a deity that may fully include the functions of the deity of the model culture, the linguistic process we may observe is, typically, the borrowing of the theonym. Generally, it *should* be a borrowing, because we can only ascertain an equation between a local and a foreign deity when we see a competition between the native and the foreign theonyms. However, the possibility of a calque – specifically a semantic calque – does exist, which means that a given deity of the target culture may acquire the features of a foreign deity without any theonym borrowing. In other terms, the native deity broadens his/her scope as a consequence of cultural contact with a foreign pantheon. In the case of a borrowing, the two theonyms may either coexist for an extended period of time, or one may come to replace the other over time.

Finally, the last column describes the possible assimilation strategies (if any) of the foreign deities to the native ones. Of course, in the first scenario, in which no native deity is involved, no assimilation strategies are expected to occur. In the second scenario, in which the native deity only partly matches the adopted one, the result is typically the creation of a hypostasis of the native deity: the new deity becomes one of the manifestations of the local deity, whose particular properties

are lexically specified in the theonym. The third scenario is more complex, because the foreign deity entering the pantheon of the target culture may undergo either a complete or partial functional overlapping with the native deity (this means that, in contrast with the second scenario, it is the foreign deity that may have a narrower scope compared to the native one that is chosen to assimilate him/her).

In the first case, the two deities become no more distinguishable, and the two theonyms are thus fully interchangeable with each other in all of the contexts. We label this as full syncretism.¹⁵

In the second case, the foreign deity may be confined to just some of the hypostasis of the native deity, so that the two theonyms are not fully interchangeable with each other in all of the contexts. We label this as partial syncretism. The distinction between these two typologies can only be made by carefully evaluating the contexts in which the different theonyms referring to the same deity occur.

Finally, when the functions of a foreign deity are transferred onto a native deity without any theonym borrowing, we speak of absorption, although it can be regarded as a particular subtype of full syncretism.

Of course, we should stress that this classification must be taken as tentative and provisional. This model was mostly built based on data from ancient Anatolia, so that it should not be understood as universally valid: its application to other situations may involve adjustments. Furthermore, we are aware that it features some oversimplifications. First of all, as mentioned, it is designed assuming a situation in which only two cultures are involved, but more complex pattern of interaction may exist, involving more cultures and thus, potentially, a number or intermediaries in the process. Secondly, we are aware that combining linguistic and extra-linguistic processes into the same model could imply the identification of a given culture with a given language. So, for example, if we speak of adoption of Hurrian deities by the Hittites based on Hurrian divine names in Hittite texts, we are equating the Hittite culture with the Hittite language and the Hurrian culture with the Hurrian language. This, of course, is problematic in general, but even more so in a multicultural and multilingual situation like the one of the Hittite Kingdom. Nevertheless, generalisations imply abstraction, which cannot help but resort to some simplifications. Our model should be understood as a general guide, which cannot substitute for a more fine-grained case-by-case analysis.

¹⁵ We chose “syncretism” as an umbrella term, although we are aware that a syncretic process is different from, e.g., an assimilatory one. However, the inclusion of more fine-grained distinctions in this domain would require a different set of parameters that would highly complicate the model.

4. The Model at Work: Examples from the Ancient Syro-Anatolian Area

In order to substantiate what we have described theoretically in the previous section, we will offer in the following some possible examples for each of the scenarios we have identified, all taken from the ancient Anatolian and Syrian areas (2nd–1st millennium BC).

Starting from the first initial condition, in which no native god is found that is regarded as corresponding to the foreign one that is adopted by the members of the target culture, an example reflecting a linguistic borrowing may be the Hurrian god Aršappa/Iršappa,¹⁶ whose theonym is a clear borrowing of the Syriac god Rešep, adapted to Hurrian phonology through vowel prosthesis in order to avoid a phonologically impossible initial /r-/ in Hurrian.

As to theonyms built with linguistic material of the target language, we could perhaps consider the case of Ninga, the deity of the earthquakes, mentioned in the Hittite omen text KUB 8.28 obv. *passim*. Because it occurs in the sentence ^d*Ninga ninikzi*, literally ‘the Shaker-god shakes’, matching the Akkadian *figura etymologica rību irūb*, it has been suggested that Ninga was an occasional calque on Akkadian.¹⁷ On the other hand, an example of periphrasis in the first scenario is possibly found in the Sam’alian KTMW stela from Zincirli, in which some Anatolian deities occur in a Semitic disguise. Among these deities, there is an unclear *ngd/r šwd/rn* that can be explained in different ways. If we accept the reading *ngd šwdn*, with the meaning ‘official of the hunts’, we would have a periphrasis possibly built to denote the Anatolian stag-god Runtiya.¹⁸

The second scenario can be exemplified by another theonym found in the KTMW stela, *hdd krmn*, ‘Hadad of the vineyards’, which patently was a calque of the Luwian god *tuwarsassis Tarhunzas* sometimes occurring in hieroglyphic inscriptions.¹⁹ In this case, the Luwian hypostasis of the Storm-god could be equated with the Semitic Hadad, but in order to have a perfect match it was necessary to build a new complex word by calquing the Luwian model, which, on the theological side, resulted in the creation of a new hypostasis of Hadad.

As for periphrases, we may mention *ršp šprm* ‘Rešep of the goats’ in the Phoenician version of the KARATEPE inscription, matching the Anatolian god Runtiya. In this case, Runtiya is equated with the Semitic god Rešep, but a new hypostasis of this god was created by adding the modifier *šprm*, to provide a match with the Anatolian god.

As for the third scenario, an example of borrowing with a complete functional overlapping between the native and the foreign deity could be the full assimilation

¹⁶ See van Gessel (1998, 47–48) for the occurrences.

¹⁷ Cf. Riemschneider 2004, 246 (“eine ad-hoc-Erfindung des Übersetzers”). Note, however, that Ninga possibly occurs elsewhere in the Hittite corpus (see van Gessel 1998, 340), so the hypothesis of a calque remains tentative.

¹⁸ See Giusfredi & Pisaniello 2021, 214–215 for other possible explanations and references.

¹⁹ Cf. SULTANHAN §§ 2, 8; BOR § 4.

between the Hurrian Storm-god Teššub and the Anatolian Storm-god Tarḫunta, so that the two deities cannot be distinguished and their theonyms were interchangeable in the same contexts. For example, in the Festival for Ištar of Šamuḫa (KUB 27.1 i 47–53), we find a list of offerings to several hypostases of the Storm-god, whose name is always written logographically (^d10), but sometimes the phonetic complement *-ub* occurs, probably pointing to the reading “Teššub” for all of them, which could show that the identification between Tarḫunta and Teššub involved all of the possible manifestations of the Anatolian Storm-god. In other cases, the syncretism may have been only partial, as, perhaps, in the case of the Anatolian Sun-deity vs. the Hurrian Ḫepat: although the latter was assimilated to the former (with the borrowing of the theonym), it is not entirely clear from the texts whether Ḫepat covered all of the different hypostases of the Anatolian Sun-deity.

Finally, as an example of absorption, we could perhaps mention again the Anatolian Sun-deity, who acquired some properties of the Mesopotamian Sun-god Šamaš, although, as far as we know, the Hittites never actually venerated Šamaš (and his name did not occur in Hittite texts). From a linguistic standpoint, this is a sort of semantic calque.

5. Conclusions

To summarize, when different religious traditions came into contact, several possibilities of interaction among gods may occur, which concern both the linguistic and the theological levels. Because our projects mostly assume a linguistic point of view, our aim in this paper was to suggest a model of analysis about the modes of interactions of gods in ancient Anatolia that primarily takes into account linguistic aspects, trying to apply them to the cultural milieu of the Hittites. This may make it possible to detect changes and continuity, as well as spheres of interference and local differentiation.

We are aware that our proposal is provisional and certainly needs to be further supplemented on the theological side. Moreover, because it is primarily based on Anatolian data and languages, it will probably require adaptation to be applied to other contexts. However, what we can agree upon is that the “Thousand Gods of Ḫatti” was an inclusive religious system, in which every possible pantheon (i.e., Luwian, Palaic, etc.) and their interactions have always been filtered through Ḫattuša.

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