



DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS: FOREIGN DEITIES IN EGYPT DURING THE LATE BRONZE AGE: ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS ADAPTION AND ASSIMILATION

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A challenging and interesting theme for Egyptology and the Near Eastern studies is the appearance, development, and assimilation of foreign deities in Egypt during the Late Bronze Age.¹ Several past studies have treated the assimilation of Syro-Palestinian deities in Egypt² without including those of adjacent Near Eastern regions, such as Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis of all relevant textual and iconographical sources in both royal and non-royal Egyptian contexts is still wanting. This doctoral dissertation will attempt to cover this gap by examining all of the imported Anatolian and Mesopotamian deities (i.e., Teshub, Ningal, Ishtar, etc.) in Egypt and by analyzing and re-evaluating their presence and status in textual and archaeological sources.

Through careful analysis of the texts, it is possible to identify several forms by which these deities manifested in Egypt (e.g., as transported sculptures; as guarantors of treaties between Egypt and its Near Eastern peers) that provide examples of religious syncretism. The analysis will take into account a theoretical framework on two levels: (a) cultural history pertaining to the fields and to the societies under examination (Egyptology, Near Eastern studies) and (b) histories of religion and cultural contact. This framework will enable the reevaluation of such notions as polytheism, syncretism, and personal piety in connection with the foreign deities and new religion. Differentiation in the status of foreign deities in Egypt distinguishes official religion from private and underlines various roles and symbolisms of these gods on both levels.

In order to evaluate the import of Syro-Palestinian deities in Egypt, it is necessary to examine Egyptian and

Near Eastern textual sources such as hymns and mythological texts (e.g., Ugarit texts), memorial stelae (e.g., the stela of Ramose, the Four-Hundred-Year Stela), reliefs (e.g., in the temple of Amun and at Kom Ombo), and diplomatic material and correspondence (e.g., the Amarna letters). Archaeological material, such as scarabs, seals, plaques, and stelae, will also shed light upon the role of these deities in the religious life and cultic practices of the Egyptians.

One important aspect of the research will be the identification and evaluation of vague foreign presences and symbols in the textual and iconographical record, as different deities could have the same characteristics and functions (for example, the *atef*-crown is typical of both Anat and Astarte in archaeological material). Established identification criteria (i.e., weapons, headdresses, etc.) posed by previous studies need to be reexamined and redefined in order to distinguish the characteristics of Syro-Palestinian deities in Egyptian theological discourse.

Another important part of this research will be the examination of certain aspects of religious and cultural semantics, such as the origin and adaptation of foreign cults in Egypt, the assimilation and/or transformation of their characteristics and roles, and their impact on specific political cultural interconnections of the period, as well as their assimilation with specific rulers. For instance, Amenhotep II adopted two Syro-Palestinian deities, Reshep and Astarte, in order to enhance his warlike nature and diplomatic kinship. Typological analysis of certain material, such as scarabs, will also shed light on chronological questions and definitions. This will allow us to determine whether the worship of foreign deities was

incorporated into the state religion or was undertaken by a specific ruler for explicitly propagandistic reasons (power, authority, etc.).

More specifically, the proposed research for this dissertation will focus on the following topics:

- The appearance of foreign deities in the archaeological material, revealing the royal and non-royal religious beliefs and practices in state cult, funerary ideology, and personal piety.
- The iconographical development of foreign deities in relation to their adopted role and interconnection with the political rulership.
- The cultural contacts of foreign deities from Anatolia and Mesopotamia, with a special focus on the “fertility” goddesses in Near East and Egypt.
- Aspects of religious ideology in the Near East and their sociopolitical implications (imperialism, impartation of ideas and symbols) that facilitated the induction and assimilation of foreign cults into the Egyptian belief system.

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² Michael David Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978); Izak Cornelius, *The Many Faces of the Goddess: The Iconography of the Syro-Palestinian Goddesses Anat, Astarte, Qedeshet, and Asherah c. 1500–1000 BCE*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 204. (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Götter, Göttinnen und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen*, 6th ed. (Freiburg Schweiz: Academic Press & Bibel+Orient Museum, 2010); Joanna Stuckey, “The Great Goddesses of the Levant,” *Journal of the Society for the Study on Egyptian Antiquities* 30 (2003): 127–157; Keiko Tazawa, *Syro-Palestinian Deities in New Kingdom Egypt: The Hermeneutics of Their Existence* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2009).