



Review

Keiko Tazawa

SYRO-PALESTINIAN DEITIES IN NEW KINGDOM EGYPT: THE HERMENEUTICS OF THEIR EXISTENCE

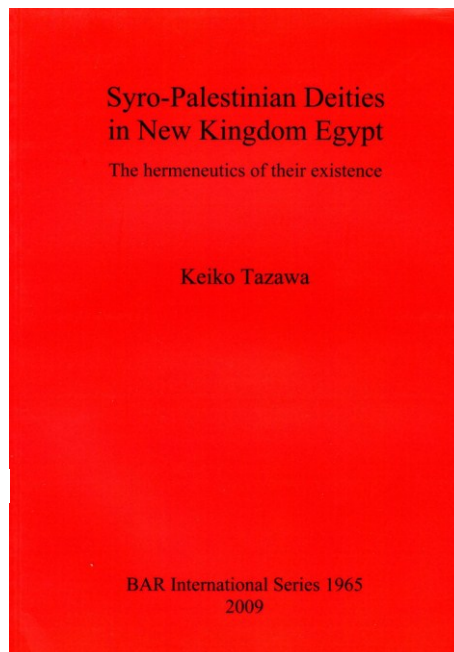
BAR International Series 1965 (BAR S1965). Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009.

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The publishers' introduction for this book concisely summarizes the scope of the study:

“How did Syro-Palestinian deities come into existence in Egyptian society? What was the *raison d'être* of Syro-Palestinian deities in Egyptian society? These are among the central questions explored in this study. To answer them, the author applies interdisciplinary theories of anthropology to the pure results of data analyses of six Syro-Palestinian deities ... (Baal, Reshef, Hauron, Anat, Astarte and Qadesh); analyses of these evidences from iconographic and textual representations with the use of statistical procedure; discussions of the results of these analyses for every deity from the viewpoints of history, theology, ideology and religious style in both the royal and non-royal spheres. Conclusions are suggested through the discussions above with application of two anthropological theories: Tributary Relationship based on comparative studies and Translative Adaptation theory.”

“Tributary Relationship Theory” as propounded by Bruce Trigger¹ is the better known of the anthropological approaches mentioned in this introduction and has been applied to Egyptian civilization by Trigger and others, while “Translative Adaptive Theory” was proposed by K. Maegewa in his 1994 dissertation *Australian Socio-Economic Influences on Badu, Torres Strait – “Strategic Adaptation” of Middlemen and “Translative Adaptation” of the Community* to explain complex economic changes occurring in Badu under Western influence in pre-modern/modern times. While Maegewa's study focused on eco-



nomically rather than religious issues, the parallels are explained in Tazawa's introduction (Part 1), and both Trigger's and Maegewa's theories are successfully employed in this investigation of Syro-Palestinian deities in Egypt. Part 1 also reviews current scholarship regarding the six deities selected for this study and our understanding of their natures, characteristics and attributes.

Part 2, “Syro-Palestinian Deities in the Egyptian Context”, consists of a careful cataloguing of the material evidence, iconography, and textual epithets and roles of the six deities considered in the study. Part 3 focuses on Syro-Palestinian deities in Egyptian royal scenes from selected reigns, while Part 4 examines the evidence for Syro-Palestinian deities in ancient Egyptian daily life, and the final section, Part 5, looks at the interaction between the selected Syro-Palestinian deities and Egyptian deities as found in syncretisms and combinations such as Seth-Baal and divine relationships such as those found between Qadesh, Reshef and Min. A conclusion, Part 6, summarizes Tazawa's findings regarding the ways in which Syro-Palestinian deities were integrated into the Egyptian pantheon in three discrete yet related contexts – royal scenes, personal religion, and amalgamation with indigenous Egyptian deities.

An interesting point relative to Part 4 is the discussion of R. Stadelmann's argument² that Syro-Palestinian deities were introduced into Egypt as “war deities”, especially in the early 18th Dynasty when Egyptian kings needed them to ensure victory in Asiatic campaigns (p. 151). According to this view, these foreign

deities then entered popular religion as time passed. The present study shows that while this may be true for some deities such as Reshef, the same cannot be said of others such as Qadesh who never appeared in royal contexts and was clearly present in popular religion from her earliest appearances.

Another interesting finding – among many – stressed by Tazawa is that in Egypt the spheres of worship of Syro-Palestinian deities are essentially confined to the needs for healing, love and prosperity, long and healthy life, proper burial and favored afterlife. While these areas may seem broad they do not, as Tazawa points out, include important transitional parts of life such as birth, maturation, parenthood, or mortuary rites (p. 152).

While there were other Syro-Palestinian gods and goddesses that could and did enter Egypt, the six deities selected by Tazawa are by far the most important foreign deities assimilated into Egyptian religion from the northeast, and the findings relating to these deities would most probably apply to others from the same area. In any event, the findings reveal consistent patterns of assimilation that make the study extremely worthwhile. The material has been carefully researched and is clearly presented with excellent detail and documentation.

The book is also well produced. Quality of production and proofing is high and without noticeable errors. The quality of diagrams and charts is generally high, though a few grey-tone diagrams are somewhat small and fuzzy. Color printed pie-charts summarizing types of evidence for the six deities considered in the study are printed at different scales relative to total amounts

of evidence for each deity and are very helpful. Although there is no index, the material is well organized and for the most part it is easy to find treatments of specific topics. The bibliography is extensive and up to date.

A small but not unimportant point which might be contested (p. 9) is the stress on Christopher Eyre's 1987 comments³ characterizing Egyptology as studying its subject in isolation from knowledge of other cultures, and while this point is validly made in connection with the pioneering work of Trigger and others, it should be contextualized by the fact that although the criticism was often valid twenty years ago, the argument has lost its force since that time – as might be seen in the subject of Tazawa's study, and in the fact that this book is being reviewed in a journal titled *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*.

In summary, this volume represents an important contribution to the field which will well repay study by anyone interested in Egyptian religion per se or in the religious interaction that took place between Egypt and surrounding cultures.

- JAEI Editorial Staff

Notes

¹ Bruce Trigger, *Early Civilizations: Ancient Egypt in Context*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1993; and *Understanding Early Civilizations: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

² R. Stadelmann, "Syrisch-Palaestinensische Gottheiten in Aegypten", *Das Altertum* 12 (1966): 75-84.

³ C. J. Eyre, "Work and the Organization of Work in the Old Kingdom" in Powell, M. (ed.), *Labor in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 5-47. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987.