

# REVIEWS

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## THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

MICHELE CAMMAROSANO:

### *Hittite Local Cults.*

(Writings from the Ancient World Series 40.) xxiv, 510 pp. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018. \$69.95. ISBN 978 1 62837 215 1.

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This book is the result of many years of research that the author has devoted to the corpus of Hittite texts generally labelled as “cult inventories”. This term defines the particular documents dealing with the cult management of local towns and villages, issued on a regular basis by the Hittite central administration to regulate and keep track of a complex mosaic of peripheral cults. These texts can be dated, with rare exceptions, to the so-called Late Empire Period, and represent an invaluable source for our understanding of many crucial mechanisms of the religious administration of the Hittite Kingdom. Previously, Hittite cult inventories have been the subject of important studies, such as C. Charter’s unpublished dissertation (“Hittite cult inventories”, Chicago, 1962), or J. Haazenboos’ more recent monograph (*The Organization of the Anatolian Local Cults during the Thirteenth Century B.C.: An Appraisal of the Hittite Cult Inventories*, Leiden: Brill, 2003), but this new study offers a reappraisal of the topic, and a systematic investigation of many aspects of the corpus hitherto neglected. One major problem for scholars working on Hittite cult inventories was how to find an adequate categorization that would do justice to the complexity of the documentary material. In his book, Cammarosano attempts a typological classification based essentially on the layout of the tablets and the occurrence of a selected number of distinctive elements, such as information on the gods and cult images, or descriptions of festivals. Combining these elements, he succeeds in providing a convincing classification of the sources, whose heuristic potential is certified by the amount of new insights resulting from the research.

The book is divided essentially into two parts, preceded by a short introduction (chapter 1), where the semantics of the expression “Hittite local cults” are discussed, with methodological considerations. The first part (chapters 2–6) brings together a series of detailed studies on several aspects of the Hittite local cults, concerning both the form and content of the inventories as a textual genre. Chapter 2, besides analysing the current state of research on the texts, focuses on the problem of the nature and purpose of the so-called cult inventories, and the dating and geographical scope of the sources. Particularly important is the critical discussion of the theory, often advanced by scholars – albeit not always convincingly – that the cult inventories are the product of an attempt at “religious reform” by King Tuthaliya IV. The author rightly reasserts the idea, discussed at length in a 2012 publication (M. Cammarosano, “Hittite cult inventories. Part two: the dating of the texts and the alleged ‘cult reorganization’ of Tudhaliya IV”, *Altorientalische Forschungen*, 39/1, 3–37), that nothing in the preserved sources suggests a centralized process of systematization, aimed at imposing a “standard” pattern of rites over the multi-faceted panorama of local cults. On the contrary, the prescriptive measures of the sources should be considered as reflecting an interest by the central administration in traditional customs of the peripheral centres of the state.

Chapter 3 deals with palaeographic and linguistic features. Here we find one of the book’s most original contributions: the attempt to analyse the language of the cult inventories as technical jargon. This is allegedly reflected in the use of specific

words and formulaic expressions, either as new formations attested only in the texts under analysis, or as pre-existing words which are re-sematized in the context of the cult inventories, taking on a specialized meaning. The author claims that other elements that seem to hint at technical jargon are the frequent use of formulaic expressions, and the presence of particular syntactic phenomena, analysed as strategies of language compression. The cult inventories also display a consistent system of very specific orthographic conventions, which leads the author intriguingly to suggest the existence of a specific scribal training, perhaps reflected in the work of a particular class of Hittite scribes specialized in the production of wooden waxen tablets written in cuneiform. This idea is fascinating, but certainly needs to be further investigated, requiring specific research which goes beyond the scope of the book.

Chapter 4 relates to the nature of local pantheons, and the “visible presence” of the gods in the form of cult images of different sizes and materials, generally housed in shrines and temples, or located by open-air sanctuaries (sacred springs, mountains). Particular attention is given to the iconography of the divine representations described in the cult inventories (with a useful overview of the cult image descriptions attested in the texts published in the second section). The historical-religious analysis of the cult inventories continues, in chapter 5, with a systematic investigation of the festivals attested in the cult inventories, their nature, their position within the Hittite cult calendar, and their function.

The sixth and final chapter of the first section aims to analyse socio-economic aspects of local festivals, with a short metrological study of the measures attested in the sources, a survey of the different types of vessels used during the ceremonies, and an overview of the officials and groups of people responsible for delivering cult supplies.

The second section of the book (chapter 7) is a philological edition of 17 Hittite texts, selected as particularly representative of the genre of cult inventories. The documents are presented in transliteration and translation, and are supplemented by an introduction and a short philological commentary. The text edition is a remarkable philological work, which has benefitted greatly from a direct collation of the original manuscripts and the possibility of using 3D models of the tablets. A system of cross-references between the first section and the text editions allows one to connect the discussion of relevant problems with the published sources, allowing a very productive use of the book.

The number of topics treated, the variety and originality of the insights, and the philological accuracy of the editions makes this book a valuable and most welcome contribution to our understanding of Hittite religion. Not only experts, but all those interested in the mechanics of ancient cult practices should be grateful to the author.

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HASAN PEKER:

*Texts from Karkemish I: Luwian Hieroglyphic Inscriptions from the 2011–2015 Excavations.*

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The first volume in the new OrientLab Series Maior is dedicated to new inscriptions found at Karkemish in the recent excavations from 2011–15. This handsome, much