Religious networks and cultural exchange. Some cases from the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean in the 3rd–1st millennia BC

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Edited by Rocío Da Riva,
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The Melammu Logo was drawn by Rita Berg from a Greco-Persian style seal found on the north-eastern shore of the Black Sea (Dominique Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (London: British Museum Publications 1987), no. 432).

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Table of Contents

Religious Networks and Cultural Exchange

Some Cases from the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean in the 3rd–1st Millennia BC

Ian Rutherford

Mobility is part of what makes us human. Even in the most sedentary societies, most people make regular short journeys away from their homes, while some develop expertise in routes of travel far beyond their immediate territory for the sake of trade, exploration or religious knowledge.[1] Such patterns of movement over shorter or longer distances naturally lead to regular contact between people from different communities, and it may be that over time certain locations become recognised as preferred meeting places, and as important centres defined in terms of power, economy and/or religion. Scholars have recently become interested in the role of such nodes or hubs – as they are known in network theory – as facilitators of cultural or religious change.[2] In this paper I want to examine the role of religious hubs as contributing to the transmission of religious ideas in the ancient world. One way this can happen is that the hub is the site of a festival which draws people in from a broad geographical area, acting as a focus both for a limited social group who know each other anyway, but also for a broader range of people from different social groups.[3]

In the last few decades there has been a trend to interpret archaeological sites that show signs of being early religious centres as hubs of major religious networks and pilgrimage. They include Göbeklitepe in SE Anatolia from the 11th century BC (see Schmidt, 2006; Schmidt, 2007: 238), Gilat in Israel (Chalcolithic period = 4500–3500 BC; see Aron/Levy, 1989), and the site of Kavos on the Aegean island of Keros (mid 3rd millennium BC).[4]

It is a reasonable hypothesis that "pilgrimage" of this sort, if it happened, had a social effect, creating communication and cohesion and ultimately facilitating the emergence and self-definition of a social group.[5] It is even possible that participation in religious networks may have played a part in the formation of states,

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[1] Helms, 1988 is a good general study of this phenomenon.

[2] Cf. Meinert, 2015: 9, Jaspert, 2012: 170–71.

[3] See already Bachvarova, 2016: 224, 344–5; Rutherford, 2017.

[4] Renfrew/Boyd/Ramsey, 2012. Renfrew, 2001 rejects the term "pilgrimage" in favour of "high devotional expression". Bintliff, 2012: 103–4 discusses festival visitation in in the Aegean Saliagos culture of the Final Neolithic period.

[5] See McCorriston, 2011: 52; McCorriston 2013: 608; for the Greco-Roman period Rutherford, 2017.

as has in fact been suggested for the Ancient Near East.[6] The Greek philosopher Plato, who was perhaps closer to ancient festival culture than we are, defined the purpose of civic festivals as being

> "so that ... people may fraternize with one another at the sacrifices and gain knowledge and intimacy, since nothing is of more benefit to the state than this mutual acquaintance" (*Laws* Book 5.738d–e).

As well as creating the possibility of communication and thus cohesion within narrow group of primary participants, it could also be argued that such network hubs encourage a broader cultural movement between groups of participants. This could happen in two ways: first, if the festival or cult centre brings together people from two or more overlapping group networks, allowing for the transmission of information between them; alternatively, it might happen if, besides a core network of primary participants, secondary participants from more distant locations were also present.

These broader patterns might be expected to be found particularly in the context of large festivals held at major religious centres, the appeal of which could easily have been transregional. It makes sense to look first at Greek religious networks of the 1st millennium BC, because the evidence for this period is relatively good. Many of them seem to have been more or less confined to Greek participants, e.g. the great festival networks of Olympia and Delphi, or Athens' imperial network, in which major religious festivals in the city were used to collect and assess tribute from its subject -allies. Others seem to have had a broader scope. A good example is the sanctuary of Artemis at Ephesos, whose origins may well lie in the Late Bronze Age when Apasa was a major city of Arzawa in contact with the Hittites (see Büyükkolancı, 2007, Günnel, 2017: 123, Gander, 2017: 269–70). In the 1st millennium this cult was known for its numerous secondary foundations dispersed widely the Mediterranean,[7] including one in Marseilles and another at Empúries north of Barcelona.[8] Ephesos itself can be shown to have been a meeting place for different cultures, primarily between Greeks and Western Anatolians, but there is evidence of Near Eastern interest as well, for example a fragment of an ivory plaque was found depicting a griffin and a tree of life.[9] There are also signs of Phoenician involvement (see Bammer, 1985), and a degree of Persian influence in the mid 1st millennium BC seems to be indicated by the fact that at that period the chief priest had a Persian title: *megabyzos* (Bremmer, 2004). It thus seems that Ephesos functioned a sort of hub for a number of different cultures,

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[6] See Yoffee, 2004: 91.

[7] The Roman writer Pausanias (4.31. 8) says: "All cities worship Artemis of Ephesos, and individuals hold her in honor above all the gods.". See further Elsner, 1997 for dissemination of the distinctive 'multi-breasted' iconography of the goddess.

[8] See Malkin, 2011: 197–204.

[9] Braun-Holzinger/Rehm, 2005: 143, E2.

probably facilitating the transmission of religious ideas and practices.

Another example would be the cult of Apollo on the Aegean island of Delos, whose origins may go back to the Late Bronze Age, but in the mid 1st millennium was primarily cultivated by Greeks from Ionia and the Aegean, as well as from Athens, but also attracted visitors from further afield. According to one tradition a key role in establishing the Delian cult was played by the poet Olen from Lycia in S. Anatolia (Apollo himself was thought to have links to Lycia), and it was supposed to be the terminus for regular offerings from the Hyperboreans in the distant and semi-mythological north.[10] An early hymn to Apollo (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 162–4) reports that a group of female singers on the island, the so-called Delian Maidens, could sing in any language, imitating visiting pilgrims. In the Hellenistic period, Delos was cultivated by people from a number of eastern Mediterranean cultures, including Phoenicians and Egyptians. Like other Greco-Roman sanctuaries, Delos functioned as a major trading hub, at least in the late Hellenistic and Roman period.[11]

It is usually thought that patterns of human movement are very different in the Late Bronze Age, reflecting the power of centralised royal palaces, which may act alone or in concert.[12] This is not, however, incompatible with the model outlined above because centres of royal power (palaces or capital cities) could also function as religious hubs. Let us consider one of the main festivals of the Hittite state, the KI.LAM-festival.[13] "KI.LAM" is usually translated "gatehouse" in this context, though an earlier meaning of it was "market", which suggests that trade might have played a part in the festival, as it did in Greek ones.[14] This was a major event, attended by people from all over the Hittite kingdom, from the Hittite homeland to the Lower Land in SE Anatolia and the Upper Land in the North West. Some groups from more local towns performed dances and took part in processions. Officials from different parts of the Hittite kingdom made symbolic

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[10] See Brill's New Pauly (Leiden/Boston 2002–), s. Olen (vol.10.86) and s. Hyperborei (vol.6.633).

[11] For sanctuaries and markets, see Frayn, 1993: 133–44; de Ligt, 1993: 56–105 and appendix 1, 243–246; Horden/Purcell, 2000: 432–434; McCorriston, 2011: 28–3. MacMullen, 1981: 26 points to the example of the festival of Olympia, known as "mercatus Olympicus" (Justin 1.3.5) and the market-festival of Isis at Tithoreia in Boeotia, as described by Pausanias, 10.32.15.

[12] The classics statement of this is by Zaccagnini, 1983, who, considering craftsmen distinguished three types of movement: 1) redistributive, i.e. controlled by a single palace; 2) reciprocative, i.e. taking place between palaces; and 3) commercial, which he saw as emerging in the 1st millennium.

[13] See Singer, 1983–1984.

[14] KI.LAM meaning "gate-house": Singer, 1975: 91–5; at Ebla KI.LAM may have meant "a festival during which a fair was held": Biga, 2002; for trade and festivals: Biga, 2003; Rutherford, forthcoming a.

offerings of grain, which were inspected by the king.[15] The effect of this festival can only have been to level out cultural differences between different parts of the Hittite empire.

Among the groups of attenders were "*ubaru*-men" (*Ubaru* is an Akkadian word used by the scribes; the corresponding Hittite term is unknown) who appear in many rituals alongside Hittite officials, and take part in the "grand assembly". These are usually interpreted as foreigners of high status dignitaries, possibly diplomats of some sort, with long-term residence at the Hittite court.[16] They are attested in many other festivals as well; in a fragment of one of the main festivals they seem to take part in a feast, along with other dignitaries.[17] One way of understanding this is that one of the main aims of the festival was to display the power and religious expertise of the king. To use the terminology of recent anthropology, the festival was a "costly signal", which needed to be witnessed by as broad an audience as possible to have its intended effect.[18]

Another class of foreign witnesses to Hittite festivals might have been bearers of tribute. That the offering of tribute could have a religious dimension in Hittite mentality is shown by the decree of king Suppiluliuma II issued after the conquest of Alashiya (around 1200 BC), in which Alashiya was ordered to send tribute to four of the main Hittite deities and apparently to present these offerings in the Hittite capital. It seems unlikely that this case is unique. [19]

For the presence of foreigners at festivals there are Mesopotamian parallels. Tonya Sharlach has discussed the role of foreign diplomats at festivals at Ur in the Ur III period: they seem to have witnessed the great festival of Tummal at Nippur and also at the two Akitu festivals in spring and autumn; in the autumn they may have accompanied the king to the Akitu-house at Ga'eš to witness his ritual act of ploughing.[20] The same pattern is attested at Mari where a new year festival is witnessed by "messengers" from the city of Esnunna.[21] *Ubaru*-men, including some from Assur, are also attested in texts from Nuzi, both at festivals and (apparently) accompanying the king on religious missions in the region.[22] Some Amarna Letters refer *ubaru*-men as being present on festive occasions at

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[15] See Singer, 1984.

[16] Süel, 1976–7; Bodi, 2003, Na'aman, 2005; Görke, 2014; CAD *s.v.* Wilhelm, 2005 argues that the meaning could have been "exile" on the basis of a parallel Hurrian word which seems to be derived from a root meaning "loosen, release".

[17] KUB25.3, iii.17–24. They also play a part in the festivals of thunder, CTH 631; Barsacchi, 2017.

[18] For the model of "costly signalling" see Kantner and Vaughn 2012.

[19] KBo12.38; Güterbock, 1967; translation in COS 1.192–3. For tribute in general, see J. Siegelova in RlA s. "Tribut. D. Bei den Hethitern" (2014, 133).

[20] Sharlach, 2005: 21–2; cf. also Sallaberger 2014: 17.

[21] ARM1.50; see Sharlach, 2005: 23; Cohen, 1993: 417.

[22] See Zaccaginini, 2016: 48.

the Hurrian court.[23] The expectation was that kings attended each others' festivals through the proxy of their representatives, as we see from EA 3 (Kadashman-Enlil complains about not being invited to a festival, or being sent a greeting gift, and seems to invite the Pharaoh to a palace opening), and EA 34 (the king of Cyprus answers the complaint that he did not send a messenger (with gifts) to an Egyptian sacrifice).[24] The point of having foreign delegates present was at least partly to ensure an international audience for the ceremonies, in other words to generate international prestige. But a bi-product may well have been to bring about the dissemination of religious practice not just within region but internationally, leading perhaps to an "international style" of ceremony.[25]

This pattern of being witnessed by foreign dignitaries must have been common, but there were other forms of religious "hub" as well. Some sacred centres may have functioned as points of communication between different populations. For example, it has been suggested that the prominence of the Sumerian centre of Nippur "was derived (…) from its geographic position on an ethnic and linguistic frontier. To the south lay Sumer, to the north lay Akkad; the city was open to the people from both areas and probably functioned as an arbiter in disputes between these potential enemies."[26] Perhaps Aleppo's geopolitical location explains why Hadad of Aleppo was of interest to so many different groups in the Ancient Near East at different periods: in the late 3rd millennium it was controlled by Ebla, and records from there document visitors from a number of places (Archi, 2010: 9); in the early 2nd millennium BC it was of interest to Mari and in the later 2nd millennium BC to Hatti, Nuzi, Ugarit, Emar, Tunip and Alalah (Schwemer, 2001: 490). Notice also the sanctuaries of Dagan at Tuttul and Terqa, which were not major centres of political power, but shared sources of religious prestige, where leaders from a wide area of Syria and Mesopotamia made pilgrimages (see Feliu, 2003: 83, 123–124, 303). One document from Ebla refers to the copresence at Tuttul of sacrificers from Ebla and Mari (Sallaberger, 2008: 105–8).[27]

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[23] E.g. EA 29, 87–90 and EA 20, 72–3: see Zaccagnini, 1999: 199–20; with Kühne, 1973: 29 n. 128. For the Amarna letters see Moran, 1992 and Rainey, 2015.

[24] See on these Bachvarova, 2016: 225–6.

[25] Cf. the "international style" of art promoted by diplomatic contact: Feldman, 2006.

[26] Gibson, 1993: 3–4.

[27] It should be noted that Joy McCorriston has argued recently that there was no pilgrimage in Bronze Age Mesopotamia (McCorriston, 2011: 10–17 and passim; McCorriston, 2017). She sees different ancient societies as characterised by different "ethnoepochs" and "meta structures": for South Arabian pastoralists the ethnoepoch was "Pilgrimage", meaning that a key dynamic of their society was meeting together at religious festivals, which served as a mechanism of communication. For Mesopotamian farmers the ethnoepoch was "Household", which means that the grounding metaphor for social organisation in Mesopotamia was not coming together at a common sanctuary, but being part of the same household. I'm not convinced this is correct: Festival networks seem to have existed in Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age. In fact, there is reason to think that there were

Another interregional or international religious hub could have been Ugarit, which was a meeting place for many cultures and religious traditions: Amorite, Hurrian, Hittite, Aegean and even Egyptian. The chief deity of Ugarit, Baal Sapanu (i.e. the Baal of Mt. Sapanu) had an international dimension, known widely and "translated" into local religious idioms.[28] The religious horizons of Ugarit were wide, as we see from the ritual which Pardee calls "Ritual for National Unity" (RS 1.002; Pardee, 2002: no 22; see also Wyatt, 1998: 342–47), the liturgy of which takes account of various different groups of foreigners, including the Hurrians, Hittites, people of Qode, and Alashians (Cypriots). Egypt also had links to Ugarit: there had been intense influence in the 14th century BC, and contact also apparently at the end of the 13th, when a stele was dedicated there to Baal Sapanu by an Egyptian called Mamy.[29] Ugarit had close religious links to many towns in Syria and also Cyprus and Caphthor/Crete.[30] Should we think of an international festival at Ugarit, as in Hattusa, attended by delegates representing at least some of the groups referenced in the "Ritual for National Unity"? This must be likely. The word *ubaru* is also attested in Akkadian texts from Ugarit (referring to citizens who are given an exemption from the usual duty of hosting them), though these do not allow us to determine the exact sense (Vargyas, 1995; see Vita, 1999: 457–460). The delegates might also have been traders, like the famous merchants of Ura whose disruptive presence at Ugarit is referred to in a Hittite decree (see Beckman, 1999: no. 32).[31]

A similar religious hub may also have existed in Bronze Age Aegean, on the island of Lesbos, known to the Hittites as Lazpa. This toponym occurs in two Hittite texts relating to Ahhiyawa, now generally thought to be Mycenaean Greece. In an oracular text (AhT20) dating from the early 13th century BC the deities of Ahhiyawa and Lazpa are apparently present at the Hittite court, probably having been brought there because of the illness of a Hittite king. We know nothing about the identity of these deities, and while it is understandable that a major Mycenaean deity was famous enough to be summoned to the Hittite court, it is surprising that a deity of Lesbos had a comparable international reputation. The only other relevant piece of information comes from another Ahhiyawa text, a letter (AhT7) from the king of the Seha River land to the king of Hatti, which narrates a crisis in international relations: groups of so-called "*SARIPUTU*-men" belonging to the king of Hatti and the king of the Seha River Land have been abducted by a West

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temples in Mesopotamia whose main function was to serve as common ground for groups from different cities. Nippur seems to be such a case, and it may only be chance that we lack evidence for pilgrimages there.

[28] See Smith, 2016: 85; for the deity see Fauth, 1990, Koch, 1993 etc.

[29] See now Levy, 2014; Morris, 2015: 335–6, Singer, 1999: 711. For Egyptian influence at Ugarit in general see Singer, 1999: 621–7, 708–15.

[30] See Dietrich, 2007, Dietrich/Loretz, 1998.

[31] On Ura, see now M. Forlanini in Weeden/Ullmann, 2017: 244–5.

Anatolian warlord called Piyamaradu, who brought them to Atpa, governor of Millawanda who seems to have been an agent of Ahhiyawa. Under Hittite pressure they were eventually released. Itamar Singer has argued that the *SARIPUTU* men were "purple dyers", who were making an offering, so that the context would again be again religious, perhaps the cult of a goddess.[32]

It seems to follow from this that Lesbos may have been a key religious site in the Aegean in this period. The primary state that recognized it was perhaps the adjacent Seha-River Land, in whose territory it may at this point have been. It was also recognised by the more distant Hittites who wanted to sustain their influence in the West in this period. Wilusa in the NW might be expected to have had an interest in it as well, but it would not be surprising if it was also of interest to Mycenaean Greece, and indeed Piyamaradu's raid on the *SARIPUTU*-men could perhaps be seen as an attempt to assert control there on behalf of Ahhiyawa. It is possible to be more specific than that: there is reason to believe that Lesbos was one of a number of NW Aegean islands which were the object of a dispute between the kings of Ahhiyawa and Assuwa, a territory in NW Anatolia, around 1300 BC; in letter dating from this period (AhT6) the king of Ahhiyawa seems to base his claim to the islands on events that had happened three generations earlier, around 1400 BC, when the Hittite king Tudhaliya I/II defeated and apparently eliminated the land of Assuwa in the North West of Anatolia; the Greek king was apparently claiming that the islands had belonged to Assuwa and were ceded to him at that time.[33]

The surviving texts thus give the impression that Lesbos was a contested territory. However, ordinary religious life many have been more a matter of peaceful coexistence, and we should imagine both Anatolians and Greeks as interested in it. Its mediating role was perhaps similar to that of 1st millennium religious sanctuaries such as that of Artemis at Ephesos and that of Apollo on Delos.[34]

To sum up, I have suggested that cross-cultural exchange of religious ideas might have come about via key religious hubs – common cult centres and festivals – in which people from different regions participate. The surviving evidence allows us to reconstruct only a few examples, but it is not implausible to imagine that states all over Anatolia, the Levant, Cyprus, Crete and the Aegean, hosted such festivals. If religious ideas and practices are transmitted between cultures in this period, as they surely were, a key factor in the process may well have been the cross-cultural encounters that these festivals allowed and encouraged.

[32] See Singer, 2008. For further background, see Mason, 2008.

[33] See AhT6, with the comments in Beckman/Bryce/Cline, 2011 and Teffeteller, 2013. For the location of Assuwa, see now M. Gander in Weeden/Ullmann, 2017: 265.

[34] See further Rutherford, forthcoming b.

Abbreviations

EA   Amarna Letters

RS   Ras Shamra (excavation number)

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