

The Administration of Sacred Time in Hittite Anatolia

Francesco G. Barsacchi

Abstract: The nature of the administration of sacred time in Hittite Anatolia represents a complex problem, which has received little attention until recent years. This paper provides an overview of the topic, reconsidering the Hittite religious calendar as a whole and analysing some of the main issues connected with the Hittite calendrical system, such as the problem of the beginning of the year, the lunar nature of the Hittite month and the alleged existence of a system of intercalation.

1. Introduction

According to the well-known historian of religions A. Brelich, all calendrical studies seem to oscillate between two main interests: one that can be defined as historico-chronological, and one explicitly historico-religious (Brelich 2015: 35). Every calendrical system, indeed, displays two apparently independent aspects: a chronological aspect, since it represents essentially a form of time reckoning, and a religious one, since calendars are closely related to the celebration of festivals. The almost complete lack of administrative and economic documents from the Hittite archives (probably because this kind of sources were written on wooden writing boards) means that the only form of calendrical organisation that we can partially reconstruct for the Hittite society is the form that is reflected in the temporal setting of cult activities.¹

The cult calendar of a society can be defined, with Brelich, as ‘a given ordering of public and periodic festivals in a chronological system’.² When applied to ancient near eastern cultures, however, this very general definition demands some further explanations, since it contains a few problematic concepts, such as the use of the adjectives ‘public’ and ‘periodic.’ In the context of Hittite culture, all festivals that are documented in the sources available to us had a public character, not in the sense that they were open to everyone, but in the sense that their religious character was valid for the entire community.

¹ The very distinction between an ‘administrative’ and a ‘religious’ calendar, generally postulated in the study of ancient calendars, is, in all likelihood, anachronistic, and reflects only to a small extent the reality of the calendrical organisation in ancient complex societies. Cf. Stern 2012: 10-11.

² ‘Il calendario festivo di ogni società consiste in una determinata disposizione di feste pubbliche e periodiche in un sistema cronologico’ (Brelich 2015: 43).

More problematic is the definition of periodic festivals. In the context of modern western culture, all religious festivals can be defined as periodical: Sundays, e.g., come every seven days, and even moveable feasts, such as Easter, depend on the repetition of solar, lunar and weekly periodicities. In the context of Hittite cult, however, religious festivals could have also an occasional nature and even individual natural phenomena such as thunder, or rain, could receive a religious sanction in the form of a festival celebration.³ In this respect, I find a comparison with the ancient Roman religious-juridical distinction between *feriae stativae* and *feriae conceptivae* particularly fruitful. The public Roman festivals called *feriae stativae* had a fixed date within the calendar, recurring every year on the same day, while the *feriae conceptivae*, related to events not associated with a specific temporal setting, were celebrated every year at a variable date, which was determined each time by the proper authority. In the Hittite case, we observe that also occasional festivals, even if not exactly chronologically predictable, were perceived as periodical events and linked to specific times of the year, becoming part of the cyclical succession of religious activities that formed what we call the cult calendar.

2. A busy king: the Hittite festival organisation

The tendency towards a ‘periodicity’ in the performing of religious ceremonies represents one of the most peculiar elements of the Hittite calendar. It is not merely the reflex of a periodical occurrence of natural phenomena, it also responds to a particular religious need: the urge to include every official ceremony within an organised pattern, which guarantees the continuity of the cult and the perpetuation of the cosmic order sanctioned by the gods.

In this conceptual framework, the correct performance and the regularity of the cult represented a fundamental religious duty. Any negligence in the performance of the cult was perceived as a potential threat to the entire Land. In an important document preserved in copies dating to the Empire Period, the so-called ‘Instructions for the temple personnel’ (CTH 264),⁴ the priests of the Hittite temples are explicitly advised not to perform the spring festival in autumn and the autumn festival in spring:

Moreover, you who are the temple personnel: if you do not celebrate the festivals at festival time, (e.g.) you perform the spring festival [i]n autu[mn], bu[t] then you celebrate the autumn festival i[n] the spring [...]
(§9 in Miller 2013: 255)

The same concept is expressed in a prayer of the king Tutḫaliya IV directed to the Sun-goddess of Arinna, CTH 385. The text states, in the first preserved lines, that an oracular investigation has revealed that the goddess is angry because of the religious negligence of the king, who has neglected the correct performance of the festivals for the goddess. Specifically, he has inverted the festivals of the spring and of the autumn.

never again [shall I omit] the festivals. I will not again interchange the spring and [autumn festivals]. [The festivals of spring] I shall perform only in the spring, [and the festivals of] autumn I shall perform only in the autumn. I shall never leave out [the festivals(?)] in [your] temple.
(§1 in Singer 2002: 108)

³ See, e.g., the festivals of thunder included in CTH 631 (on which see Barsacchi 2017), or the festival of the rain performed during the 38th day of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM festival in Ankuwa. Cf. Güterbock 1960: 86-89; Jacob-Rost 1990: 35-39.

⁴ The text is published in Miller 2013: 244-266. See also Taggar-Cohen 2006: 133-139.

The omission or the incorrect performing of festivals could lead to terrible consequences. This is particularly evident in one of the so-called ‘plague prayers’ of the king Muršili II, where the cause of the plague that has been tormenting the land of Hatti since the time of his father Šuppiluliuma I is connected to the latter’s religious misbehaviour.⁵ A particular attention is given to the fact that he has omitted to perform the ritual for the Mala river.⁶ Muršili promises to the Storm-god to make amend for the faults of his father and to make up for the neglected festival.

As for the [ritual] of the Mala River, which was established for me as a cause for the plague, since I am herewith on my way [to] the Mala River, forgive me, O Storm-god of Hatti, my lord, and O gods, my lords, for (neglecting) the ritual of the Mala River. I am going to perform the ritual of the Mala River, and I will carry it out.

(§7 in Singer 2002: 59)

In the prologue of Muršili’s ten-years Annals, the king Šuppiluliuma is also accused by his son of having neglected the festival for the Sun-goddess of Arinna.

Because my father was establishing garrisons in the Land of Mittani, he lingered in a garrison and the festivals of the Sun-goddess of Arinna, my lady, were being neglected. When I, the Majesty, sat on the throne of my father, before I went to any of all the surrounding enemy lands who waged war against me, I went back to the regular festivals of the Sun-goddess of Arinna, my lady, and I celebrated them.⁷

Muršili himself, in a passage of the so-called extensive Annals, mentions the fact that he has interrupted a military campaign in order to perform some rites related to the *purulli*- festival that he has not celebrated properly.

When it became spring, whereas I had celebrated the New Year Festival,⁸ the great festival, in honour of the Storm-god of Hatti and the Storm-god of Zippalanda, but I had not celebrated the New Year Festival, the great festival, in honour of Lelwani in the *bešta*-house, I therefore came up to Ḫattusa and celebrated the New Year Festival, the great festival, in honour of Lelwani in the *bešta*-house.

(Archi 2015: 19, with reference to Götze 1933: 188-191)

That the ideal of a correct and regular performance of ritual activities did not always correspond to the reality of the Hittite cult is further confirmed by sources where the Hittites scribes show a rather pragmatic attitude towards the celebration of festivals. In the colophon of KUB 20.26, a tablet describing the autumn festival for Ištar of Šamuḫa, we found the indication that the festival as such must not be delayed but, *if* for some reasons this has happened, the cult functionaries must not make up the entire festival, but only add some special offerings to those normally prescribed for the ceremony:⁹

If the festival is neglected for two or three years they will not make up the (entire) festival; but at the festival (they provide) for her 3 bulls (among them 1 fattened bull), 16 sheep (and) 6 large loaves (among them 2 loaves of one bushel, 4 loaves of 3 seah). (Schwemer 2016: 16)

⁵ See most recently van den Hout 2020: 13-14.

⁶ Probably to be identified with the middle or upper Euphrates or one of his tributaries. Cf. Del Monte, Tischler 1978: 537; Arıkan 2007: 39-48.

⁷ KBo 3.4+ obv. i 19-22. Edited by Götze 1933: 20-21. The English translation provided here is by the author.

⁸ EZEN₄ *purulliyaš* in the text.

⁹ Cf. Schwemer 2016: 16.

Whatever the interpretation of such passages,¹⁰ it is safe to say that the cyclical repetition of festivals and their regular performance in the course of the year had a fundamental religious meaning. That explains why festival descriptions represent by far the most attested typology of documentation in Hittite archives, representing approximately the 40% of the total amount of documents in Hittite language (Lorenz 2014: 459). More than one hundred festivals are attested in Hittite sources,¹¹ and some of them lasted for more than one month. The great spring festival of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM^{SAR} received its name from a plant that flourished in spring, probably a crocus, which was at the centre of ritual actions performed by the king and the queen during the ninth day of the ceremony (Güterbock 1960: 85). In its original form, dating probably to the time of Šuppiliuma I, the festival lasted some 35 days,¹² but it was expanded at the time of the king Tuthaliya IV to a total amount of about 38 to 40 days. The great autumn festival called *nuntarriyašḫa-*, from a verb *nuntarriya-*, ‘haste, hurry,’ had a similar length and lasted about 40 days under the same king (Nakamura 2002: 11). Of the *purullifestival*, performed in the city of Nerik and in the capital Ḫattuša at the beginning of the spring, we know very little, but it must have been a long festival, considering that its description was contained in 32 tablets (Archi 2015: 11-12).

Even if we assume that not all festivals documented in Hittite archives were actually performed at the time of their written redaction, and that some of the tablets that contain their description were kept for archival purposes, the amount and variety of these ceremonies is certainly striking, to the point that it is legitimate to ask oneself, with J. Lorenz (2014: 460): did the Hittite king have any time at all for something else? Following the considerations by the same Lorenz, an answer to the question could possibly be found in the combination of three main factors: 1) Tablets of old festivals that were not celebrated anymore continued to be copied and kept in the Hittite archives for both religious and administrative purposes. 2) Older festivals were integrated within larger ceremonies during the late Hittite period; e.g., the KI.LAM festival or some sections of it seem to have become part of the *nuntarriyašḫa-* festival in the 13th century BC (Nakamura 2002:128-134). 3) Some festivals were not performed annually but in multi-year cycles. In particular, festivals performed every three years are well attested in local cult inventories (Cammorosano 2018: 109; 2019: 72-73), whereas ‘festivals of the sixth year’ are famously mentioned in Muršili II’s Annals.¹³

3. The Hittite year

But what were the main elements that determined the regular pattern of festivals and rites that shaped the Hittite calendar?

As is known, the Hittites did not develop, during their entire history, a theoretical calendar based on astronomical calculations like the ones in use from the third millennium in Mesopotamia¹⁴. The centuries-long duration of the Old Assyrian network

¹⁰ On which see the useful discussion in Schwemer 2016: 15-16.

¹¹ See Hoffner 1967: 39-41; van Gessel 2001: 281-287.

¹² As confirmed by an overview tablet dating to the time of Muršili II, KUB 30.39+ (CTH 604).

¹³ e.g. in KBo 4.14, rev. iv 38-41. Cf. Götze 1933: 138-139.

¹⁴ Recent attempts at identifying the reliefs of the main chamber of the rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya as an open-air astronomical calendar (Zangger, Gautschi 2019), should be taken very cautiously. According to this theory, the reliefs in Chamber A could have been arranged in groups that may keep track of days, synodic months and solar years. Intercalary months could also have been introduced in this calendar in order to keep the alignment of the Moon cycle with the solar year. Intriguing as

of trading colonies in the territory that would become the core of the Hittite kingdom seems not to have influenced the local inhabitants, who did not adopt the Assyrian calendar¹⁵ and used a different, observationally based, temporal organisation of their cults. Any attempt to reconstruct the Hittite cult calendar is made even more difficult by the fact that, while other Near Eastern cultures gave a name to their months, the Hittites seem to have just numbered them according to their order in the year, as can be seen in following examples:

- KBo 6.2, ii 61
 'ma-a-an¹ URU a-ri-in-¹na¹ '11¹ ITU-aš ti-ez-zi [...]
 'When in Arinna the eleventh month arrives (...)'
- KUB 29.9, vi 9-10
 ták-ku I-NA ITU.4^{KAM} EN.ZU-aš / kat-ta-an-da pa-a-u-wa-aš me-e-hu-ni a-ki
 'If the moon is eclipsed in the fourth month at the time of its setting (...)'

The first example comes from paragraph 50 of the Hittite Laws (Hoffner 1997: 61), dealing with exemptions from the *luzzi*-services in the city of Arinna, while the second one is taken from a tablet containing *omina* based on lunar observations (Riemschneider 2004: 108). Both refer to a specific month of the year, identifying it only with its number.

The basic pattern of Hittite cult as it can be reconstructed from the sources was shaped in accordance with natural rhythms. The year was divided into twelve months (see below) and three main seasons: spring, autumn, and winter, of irregular length. The existence of a fourth season was postulated by Hoffner (1974: 24-41) on the basis of some instances where the Sumerogram BURU₁₄, which literally means 'harvest', seems to have the transferred meaning of 'season of the harvest, summer'.¹⁶

The Hittite seasons were not precisely defined chronological units, depending on the observation of natural phenomena rather than on astronomical calculations. The basic temporal settings of the Hittite cult are expressed in the often-quoted prayer of Arnuwanda and Ašmunikal CTH 375, where the royal couple deplores the looting of the temples by the Kaška enemies in the following terms:

No one in those lands invokes your names anymore, O gods. No one presents to you the daily, the monthly, and the annual seasonal rituals. No one celebrates your festivals and ceremonies.
 (Singer 2002: 42)

The daily rituals mentioned in the prayer are certainly to be understood as the normal sequence of offerings of food and beverages to the deities, which were part of the regular cult activities performed on a daily basis in the temples. It is the basic cult operation often defined as 'daily bread-loaf', NINDA.GUR₄.RA UMI, in Hittite cult-inventories (Cammarosano 2018: 114-115).

The monthly and the annual rituals are related to the natural cycles of the moon and the seasons and were performed at regular intervals, or in connection with partic-

they may be, the produced arguments are not based, in my opinion, on sufficient archaeological and textual evidences. See, for a recent overview of Hittite astronomical knowledge, Rizza 2021, with further references.

¹⁵ On which see Cohen 1993: 237-247 and, more recently, Cohen 2015: 305-314.

¹⁶ On the topic, see now Cammarosano 2018: 106.

ular agricultural activities. In one of his ‘plague prayers’ to the Sun-goddess of Arinna, CTH 376, the Hittite king Muršili II reminds the gods that:

Only in Hatti they celebrate festivals for you—the festival of the month], festivals throughout the course of the year, [autumn, winter] and spring, and the festivals of the sacrificial rituals. In no other land do they perform anything for you.
(Singer 2002: 51)¹⁷

The seasonal festivals of spring and autumn represent perhaps the most important ones in the Hittite cult calendar and are connected to agricultural activity (Archi 1973: 7-27; Hazenbos 2004: 241-248). Their core was represented by the ritual act of filling a large vessel called ^{DUG}*barsi-* or ^{DUG}*baršiyalli-* with the harvested wheat, during the autumn festival, and the re-opening of the vessel during the spring festival. The wheat was then used to prepare breads that were subsequently offered to the gods. In this way the ceremonies symbolised, in their essence, the perpetual renewal of the fertility of the fields. Besides this ritual action, the ritual program of both seasonal festivals envisaged long series of offerings and libations, and, generally in the case of the spring festival, a procession, during which the statues of the gods were brought from their temples to their open-air sanctuaries, where a great banquet took place.¹⁸ As has been noted, these ceremonies present several elements in common with other functionally analogous festivals performed in other near eastern cultures, such as for instance the Mesopotamian *akītu* festival (Hazenbos 2004: 242). In the Empire Period it is very probable that some of these local festivals were integrated into the major official festival of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM plant, in spring, and the autumn *nuntarriyašḫaš* festival, whose ritual program included a series of rites performed by the royal couple in many local cult centres of the Hittite state (Hutter 2021: 242-247). Around the two major festivals of spring and autumn, a great number of seasonal ceremonies related to the agricultural cycle were performed in the course of the year, as largely documented in Hittite cult inventories (Cammarosano 2018: 129-137; Demirel 2017: 22-29).

Given their seasonal character, both the festival of the spring and the festival of the autumn did not take place at a fixed date within the calendar. In order to define better the chronological setting of these cults it is therefore necessary to establish when the Hittite year began. We do not have information about the older phases of the Hittite kingdom, but it seems certain that at least from the Empire Period, i.e. around the 14th-13th century, the Hittites followed the Babylonians in starting the annual cycle of festivals with the beginning of the spring. In his *Annals*, the king Muršili II mentions several times the celebration of the ‘festival of the year’ as the event that signals the reappraisal of the military operations after the winter period. In KBo 3.4 obv. ii 46-49, for instance, the king describes the end of his third-year campaign as follows:

When I had conquered mount Arinnanda, I came back to the river Aštarpa, I set up a fortified camp on the river Aštarpa, and there I celebrated the festival of the year. These things I accomplished in one year.
(Götze 1933: 59-61)¹⁹

¹⁷ The passage is duplicated in Muršili’s prayer to Telipinu CTH 377, § 7. Cf. Singer 2002: 55.

¹⁸ On the processions in Hittite cult, see Görke 2008: 49-72.

¹⁹ With this author’s own translation into English.

The exact meaning of the expression $EZEN_4 MU^{KAM}$, ‘festival of the year,’ is not entirely clear but, in such contexts, it probably refers to the particular ceremony, or ensemble of ceremonies, which marked the passage from the old to the new year, and was an important part both of the official cult calendar and of the local religious traditions.²⁰ Some scholars (Haas 1994: 696 ff.) have proposed to identify this ceremony with the *purulli*-festival, which was celebrated at the beginning of the spring season. As recently suggested by Hutter (2021: 242-243), it is certainly possible that some rites connected with the passage of the year, such as the symbolic translation of the old year to the *bešta*-house during the 11th day of the AN.TAḪ.ŠUM festival,²¹ could have been connected to the *purulli*-festival. An outright equivalence between the ceremony defined in the sources as $EZEN_4 MU^{KAM}$ and the *purulli*-festival, however, is not supported by the existing evidence.

Two oracular reports, KUB 5.4+ (CTH 563) and KUB 18.12+ (CTH 564), where omens concerning the place where the Hittite king will spend the winter period are collected, explicitly connect the festival of the year and the festival of thunder.

- (obv. i 16-17) ‘The Majesty in this year will spend the winter in Ḫattuša and he will celebrate in Ḫattuša the regular festivals, (i.e.) the festival of the year, the festival of thunder.’
- (obv. i 1-2) ‘[Wh]en the Majesty comes up from the military campaign, he will celebrate the gods, and the Majesty and the queen will spend the winter in Ḫattuša. There they will celebrate the festival of thunder of the Storm-god of Ḫalap, there they will celebrate the festival of the year (...).’

It is known from several sources that this festival, i.e. the festival of thunder, took place at the beginning of the spring. The celebration of the seasonal festival of the spring, indeed, was regulated in accordance with the first rainstorms of the season, that still today in central Anatolia take place between the months of March and April (Hoffner 1974: 18, 22). The introductory formula that usually opens the description of the Hittite spring festivals states: ‘When the spring comes (and) it thunders, they open the *ḫarši*-vessel’ (Cammarosano 2018: 39). The first thunders of the spring were an important marker of time. They signalled the renewal of the agricultural year and were connected with the celebration of several seasonal ceremonies (Barsacchi 2017: 18-24).

Considering the association of festivals of thunder and festival of the year, it seems very likely that the beginning of the Hittite year coincided with the beginning of the spring. This is further confirmed by the passage KUB 38.32 obv. 8 (CTH 508), that states: ‘(...) when it becomes autumn, in the eight month of the year.’ Since the autumn festival probably depended on the time of seeding, and this could not take place later than the end of October /beginning of November, the beginning of the year would coincide approximately with the month of March, when both the spring festivals and other seasonal ceremonies, like the festivals of thunder were, in all likelihood, performed.

²⁰ As can be assumed for instance from text KUB 55.1, (CTH 581’), an oracular report concerning negligences towards the cult of the Storm-god of Zippalanda and the mountain Daḫa. In line rev. iv 14, in particular, a festival defined as $EZEN_4 MU^{TI}$, ‘festival of the year,’ is mentioned among the ceremonies that are imposed to the city of Šantiwara. Cf. Barsacchi 2019b: 108. On the festival of the year, see also González García, Belmonte 2011: 472.

²¹ On which see Torri 1999: 124-127.

4. The Hittite month

As for the other basic temporal setting of Hittite festivals, the month, it seems now ascertained that it was based on the lunar phases, as in Mesopotamian calendars. This is suggested by several elements, already underlined by Del Monte (1988: 54-55):

- the fact that Hittite sources calculate pregnancy in ten months clearly depends on a calendar based on lunar regularities, as can be seen for instance in paragraph 18 of the Laws:

If anyone causes a female slave to miscarry, if she is in her tenth month, he shall pay 5 shekels of silver.

(Hoffner 1997: 29)

- In the description of a festival for the gods of the town of Ištanuwa, it is stated that the inhabitants of a city called Lalupija can celebrate the rite: ‘either in spring, at the harvest, or in autumn, or in winter,’ and in different moments of the month: ‘whether it is new moon, full moon or completed moon’ (KUB 32.123+, rev. iii 17-18). This division attests to an alignment of the month with the lunar phases.
- Other interesting elements can be found in texts where the celebration of monthly festivals, defined by the use of the Sumerographic writing EZEN₄ ITU^{KAM}, is documented. These ceremonies, like the daily offering of bread, represented part of the standard cult due to the Hittite deities, and were regularly performed in the context of many local cult calendars, in close accordance with lunar movements. Several cult inventories attest in fact, for the same cult centre, the celebration of twelve monthly festivals during one year (Cammarosano 2018: 115).

From the tablet KUB 42.100+, an inventory relating to the organisation of the cult in the city of Nerik, we receive the information that several monthly festivals could be performed in the same cult centre for different deities. The tablet mentions four monthly festivals, performed respectively for the Storm-god of the town of Zaḫalukka, the Storm-god of Heaven, the Stag-god and the god Telipinu:

(obv. i 1-2) [Fo]r the [Storm]-god of [Zaḫ]aluka the priest [regularly celebrates] 12 monthly festivals (and) 2 (more) fest[ivals], (namely) 1 autumn festival (and) 1 spring festival, fr[om his house]. (...)

(rev. iii 13'-14') For the Storm-god of Heaven the priest now regularly celebrates 12 monthly festivals, 1 spr[ing] festival, (and) [1 autumn festival] at the expense of his house. (...)

(rev. iii 49'-50') [For the Stag-god] the priest (now) regularly celebrates [12 monthly festivals, 1] autumn festival (and) 1 spring festival [from his house] (...)

(rev. iv 22'-24') And now, for him (scil. Telipinu), the priest celebrates 12 monthly festivals, 1 autumn festival (and one) spring festival, at the expense of his house. 2 BĀN-measures of flour, 1 vessel of beer, 1 pot of broad beans for each monthly festival.

(Cammarosano 2018: 341-353)

Apart the mentions of the festival in relation to a particular town or a particular deity, however, very few indications can be found in these sources concerning the nature of these religious ceremonies and the details of their ritual program. Since the monthly festivals were connected to the cult of local deities, it is safe to say that there was not a standard version of this ceremony. In every religious centre, it had probably different forms, which depended on local religious traditions and the structure of the local pan-

theons. Being related to the month and therefore to the lunar phases, it is possible that such local monthly festivals were performed at new moon, during the transition from one month to the other (Cammarosano 2018: 115). Considering that several monthly festivals seem to have been performed in the same cult centre for different local deities, however, it is also possible to imagine that, in local cult calendars, such ceremonies were not necessarily related to the passage of the month. In such cases the expression EZEN₄ ITU could more simply hint at the monthly frequency of their performance, as suggested by Houwink ten Cate.²² The monthly festival performed in Nerik for the local Storm-god, for instance, envisaged two major celebrations, each one of them lasting three days. The first one was celebrated at the beginning of the month, and therefore at new moon, and the other starting from the 13th day, in clear concomitance with the full moon. The festival is described in the text CTH 672, an edict issued by the king Tutḫaliya IV in order to regulate the cult of the Storm-god (Součková 2010: 279-300). The *incipit* of the document is partially preserved in KUB 56.48:

obv. i

6 nu A-NA D^{TU} URUⁿ[e-ri-ik ...]

7 EZEN₄ ITU^{KAM} x[...]

8 ʾGIM¹-an ITU [ú-iz-zi (?)²³ ... EZEN₄ ITU^{KAM} ʾki-iš-ša¹-an

9 i-ia-an-du x[

(6-9) For the Storm-god of N[erik...]. A festival of the month [...]. When the month [comes? ...] they perform [a festival of the month] in the following way (Součková 2010: 288)²⁴

The second ritual section of the festival is introduced as follows:

KBo 2.4, obv. i

23 GIM-an-ma A-NA ITU^{KAM} UD.13^{KAM} ti-ia-zi

24 nu EGIR-pa wa-ar-pu-wa-ar ne-ku-uz-za me-hur

(...)

27 ma-ab-ḫa-an-ma lu-kat-ta nu A-NA ITU^{KAM} ku-iš

28 UD.14^{KAM} (...)

(23-24) When the 13th day of the month begins, at nightfall, after the purification (...)

(27-28) On the 14th day of the month, at dawn (...)

(Součková 2010: 288)²⁵

²² 'I am reckoning with the likelihood that Hittite EZEN ITU(.KAM) admits of two meanings: The first is "monthly festival", and in that case it may concern the cult of any one deity (...). The second meaning is "Festival of the Month" in the strict sense (...); in that case taking place during the final days of the preceding month up to and presumably including the first day of the new month (...)' (Houwink ten Cate 1992: 94).

²³ Cf. KUB 60.121, rev. 18: nu ma-a-ab-ḫa-an GE₆-an-za ki-ša-ri ITU-kán ú-iz-zi: 'When it gets dark and the month comes.'

²⁴ With this author's own translation into English.

²⁵ With this author's own translation into English.

Another example of a local monthly festival celebrated in connection with particular lunar phases is represented by the ceremony performed for the couple Storm-god–Hepat in the Land of Kizzuwatna, in south-eastern Anatolia, and described in the document CTH 706 (Trémouille 1996: 79-104). The ceremony represents a perfect model of a peripheral festival strongly influenced by local traditions, and it is very different from other monthly ceremonies described in Hittite sources, presenting elements that clearly indicate its southern provenance. What is interesting here is that the festival is celebrated in the last days of the month, during the obscuration that precedes the first appearance of the new moon. This is described in the beginning of the text, where it is written that ‘the month culminates (finishes) and it ends’ (KUB 54.36+, obv. i 2).

As in Mesopotamia,²⁶ the Hittite month began at the first appearance of the new moon, as confirmed by passages such as KUB 60.121, rev. 18: *nu maḥḥan GE₆-anza kišari ITU=kán uizzi*: ‘When it gets dark and the month begins.’ In the framework of the official state cult a great ceremony, which is also defined in the sources as EZEN₄ ITU, was performed by the Hittite king, in order to consecrate the transition from one lunar cycle to another, a time perceived as particularly meaningful. The fragments belonging to this ceremony, which lasted three days, have been collected under the catalogue number CTH 591 and published by J. Klinger (1996: 286-614).

As I have suggested elsewhere (Barsacchi 2019a: 11-18), this festival probably included a series of purification rites performed by the king on the roof of the palace or the temple, at night, and clearly directed to the Moon-god, generally indicated by its astral number, as ^D30. This seems to be confirmed by a small group of fragments (partially collected under CTH 645), describing a ritual performed by the king during the new moon, a cleansing rite defined with the Hittite word *warpuwar*. External sources, such as the outline tablets of the great AN.TAḪ.ŠUM festival,²⁷ also seem to refer to this rite when they state: [(LUGAL-*uš=ma=za*) AN(A EZEN₄ ITU *war*)]*apz*[(*i*)], ‘the Hittite king purifies himself for the festival of the month’ (Güterbock 1960: 81).

These documents could shed light on a very peculiar Hittite ceremony, currently classified as CTH 630 and generally known as the ‘festival of the moon and the thunder.’ The festival described in the tablets associated to this corpus represents a rather unique form of religious ceremony, which is performed when a sudden thunder interrupts an ongoing festival called ‘festival of the Moon-god,’ EZEN₄ ^DEN.ZU/^D30. The *incipit* of the festival, preserved in fragment KUB 32.135 obv. i, runs as follows:

When the purifying for the festival of the Moon-god (takes place), the king purifies himself, but when the king comes from the washing-house and (it) thunders, then, if they have not called the man of the Storm-god yet, they leave the festival of the Moon-god and they celebrate the festival of thunder.

The unique expression EZEN₄ ^DEN.ZU/^D30 is attested only in documents belonging to this festival, and its exact meaning has generally remained rather obscure. In consideration of the abovementioned group of fragments describing the rites performed by the king at new moon, it is very likely that the ‘purifying’ (Hitt. *warpuwanzi*) mentioned in the *incipit* of the text should be identified with this particular sequence of rites, aimed at assuring the king's condition of purity during this time. The *hapax* ‘festival of the Moon-god’ would be just another way of defining the great ceremony of

²⁶ Cf. Steele 2007: 133-143; 2011: 471-473.

²⁷ Preserved in copies A = KBo 10.20 // B = KUB 30.39+ // C = KUB 10.94 // D = KBo 45.16(+) // E = KUB 44.39 (CTH 604). Cf. Güterbock 1960: 80-89.

the month celebrated by the Hittite at new moon, probably referred specifically to the sequence of purification rites performed on that occasion.

KUB 55.39+ is an interesting colophon of a tablet, very likely belonging to the same corpus of texts, which reads as follows:

(rev. iv 27'-29') One tablet. Finished. When the moon appears. When the king goes up to the roof for the festi[val] of the month (...).

It clearly refers, once again, to the same cultic operation. As in Mesopotamia, the first appearance of the new moon signalled the beginning of the new month. This liminal moment had such a religious significance in Hittite thought that it was associated with the celebration of regular rites. These were an important part both of local cult calendars and of the official cult of the state, where the celebration of the great festival of the month by the Hittite king reaffirmed his condition of purity and ensured the continuity of the natural balance sanctioned by the gods.

4.1. A Hittite intercalary month?

As is known, a lunar calendar, based on the appearance of the new moon, does not correspond exactly to the solar year. Since the earth's cycle around the sun determines the turn of the seasons, this discrepancy produces a progressive shift of the months with respect to the solar year. In order to keep the system of the months synchronous with the succession of the seasons it is necessary, in a lunar calendar, to add an intercalary month to a year on a regular basis. This is the solution adopted in most of the ancient Near Eastern calendars (Steele 2011: 475-478; Britton 2007: 119-124), but the existence of such an intercalation in Hittite system of time-reckoning is still a debated issue. Some scholars (Haas 1994: 692, n. 134; Fleming 2000: 215, n. 53; González García, Belmonte 2011: 472-473), focusing on the scarce references to the presence of a 13th month documented in some texts, believe that an intercalary month was actually added in order to keep the system of the months synchronous with the succession of the seasons. The text passage that is generally mentioned in this discussion as an evidence for the existence of a Hittite intercalary month comes from KBo 22.246 (CTH 698), a document dealing with the cults for Tešub and Ḫepat of Aleppo:²⁸

KBo 22.246, rev. iii

21' 13 EZEN₄ ŠA^DU^{URU} ḫa-la-ab ŠA.BA^{EZEN₄} p[u-da-ḫa-aš']

22' 1^{EZEN₄} ḫi-ya-ra-aš^{EZEN₄} ša-at-la-aš-ša-aš^{EZEN₄} x[

23' 1^{EZEN₄} GURUN EZEN₄ TÚL^{TI} EZEN₄ ḪUR.SAG^{TA} ta-at-ta [

24' EZEN₄ te-e-nu 2 EZEN₄ šenaš a-še-ša-nu-ma-an-z[i]

(21'-24') thirteen festivals of the Storm-god of Aleppo, among them: they set up the p[udaha-] festival, one ḫiyara- festival, one šatlašša festival, a festival [...], one festival of the fruit, a festival of the spring, the festival of the mountain Tatta [...] the festival of Tenu, two festivals of the šena- figurine.

The text lists the festivals in honour of the Storm-god of Aleppo that are to be performed in Ḫatti in the course of one year, but the assumption that the number of ceremonies mentioned would reflect the number of the months in the Hittite year is unfounded. No indication is given in the text concerning the timing of the festivals or

²⁸ Discussed in Souček, Siegelová 1974: 46-49.

the frequency of their celebration. Indeed, another passage of the same document records the offering of twelve sheep for the twelve months of the year, thus confirming the data concerning the total amount of twelve monthly festivals per year provided by the cult inventories:

KBo 22.246, obv. ii
 14 ŠA ITU.12^{1KAM}-*ma ku-la-mur-ši-ya ki-iš-ša*-[*an*
 15 12 UDU^{LÜ.MEŠ}NA.GAD *pí-iš-kán-zi* ½ BÁ[N

(14-15) for twelve months in/for the *kulamurši*:-²⁹ as follow[s...] the shepherds provide 12 sheep, half a BÁ[N-measure of...].

Other attestations of a 13th month could be found in Hittite celestial *omina*:³⁰

KUB 8.5, obv. 10'
 [*ma-a-an I-NA ITU.1*]3^{KAM} *I-NA UD.15*^{KAM D}[30 *a-ki*]
 [if in the thirteen]th [month], on the fifteenth day [the Moon-god dies].

KUB 8.35, obv. i 10'
 (...) *I-NA ITU.13*^{KAM} *DUMU-aš mi-ia-ri NU.GÁL ku-it-ki*
 (If) in the thirteenth month a child is born. Nothing (will happen).

These texts however, do not mirror a Hittite use because, as has been proved already by Riemschneider (1970: 44) and Fincke (2004: 238-239), they clearly represent Hittite translations of a Middle Babylonian original.³¹ Despite recent claims (Shelestin 2021: 101), I find it difficult to believe that the production of this kind of documents could be taken as evidence of a Hittite temporal structuring. Nothing, from the sources at our disposal, allows us to establish the existence of an intercalary month in the Hittite calendrical system. The beginning of the Hittite year was not determined by astronomical calculations but was established, very pragmatically, on the basis of the observation of weather and changes in climate, the flowering and fruiting of the plants and the alternation of the seasons. The same principle regulated the periodical celebration of seasonal and agrarian festivals. Such a religious calendar is subject to a certain degree of variation and does not allow exact predictions concerning the timing of some festivals. At the same time, however, it is marked by a great flexibility, which is certainly sufficient to guarantee the correlation between the succession of the seasons and the yearly cycle of the months, necessary for the correct performance of the cult of the gods.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the system of periodical festivals articulated in daily, monthly and seasonal rites that constitutes what we call the Hittite cult calendar can be reconstructed with a certain accuracy from extant sources. The absence of a written calendar based on astronomical calculations, like the ones in use in Mesopotamia, did not prevent, in other words, a rigid administration of sacred time in the form of a highly articulated

²⁹ For the obscure Hurrian term *kulamuršiya*- see Souček, Siegelová 1974: 46, n. 21. Cf. also HEG I-K: 621.

³⁰ Edited by Riemschneider 2004: 74-75, 103-106 (with this author's own translation into English).

³¹ The original Akkadian version of the document is preserved in tablet KUB 37.118, rev. 6-18. Cf. Fincke 2004: 217.

system of cults based on a close observation of natural rhythms. This system mirrors the Hittite ideal of cosmic continuity as the identity of a periodically renewed time, guaranteed by a close observance of the religious duties demanded by the gods. The carrying out of the rites at the right time by the central administration was perceived as essential to the prosperity of the entire land and strengthened the position of the king as legitimate representative of the gods before the community.³² This relationship between cult calendar and political authority is critical, therefore, to our understanding of Hittite society and lies at the very basis of the Hittite ideology of kingship.

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³² On this topic see now Beckman 2020, with previous literature.

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