

Kubaba and other Divine Ladies of the Syro-Anatolian Iron Age: Developmental Trajectories, Local Variations, and Interregional Interactions

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Abstract: Already by the Late Bronze Age, culturally distinct cults of Kubaba existed throughout the region controlled by the Hittite Empire. After the fall of the empire and the fragmentation of the political landscape of the Syro-Anatolian region, these cults persisted in local contexts, developing along their own trajectories, and thus producing hypostases of the goddess with unique roles, modes of expression, and perhaps aliases. However, these local variations did not evolve in a vacuum, but in many cases through a process of interregional and intercultural interactions. This paper will examine these processes along with the resultant expressions of local cults of Kubaba, demonstrating specific trajectories for interactions between neighboring groups, along with selective adaptations and rejections of foreign cultic concepts. Preliminary results suggest an interesting convergence between these cults and certain sociolinguistic boundaries within the region, perhaps connected to communities with shared group identities.

1. Introduction

Already by the Late Bronze Age, culturally distinct cults of Kubaba existed throughout the region controlled by the Hittite Empire. After the fall of the empire and the fragmentation of the political landscape of the Syro-Anatolian region, these cults persisted in local contexts, developing along their own trajectories, and thus producing hypostases of the goddess with unique roles, modes of expression, and perhaps aliases. However, these local variations did not evolve in a vacuum, but in many cases through a process of interregional and intercultural interactions. This paper will examine these processes along with the resultant expressions of local cults of Kubaba and other perhaps related goddesses, demonstrating specific trajectories for interactions between neighboring groups, along with selective adaptations and rejections of foreign cultic concepts. Preliminary results suggest an interesting convergence between these cults and certain sociolinguistic boundaries within the region², perhaps connected to communities with shared group identities³.

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² In general, we use terms such as "Luwian" and "Karkemišean" as cultural designators and any instance where language use is specifically intended will be explicitly marked to avoid the conflation of these two categories. As these specific examples will be contrasted at times in this article, it should be understood that we differentiate between "Luwian" cultural characteristics of largely Anatolian origin and "Karkemišean" cultural characteristics that are peculiar to the region of Karkemiš itself and illustrative of stronger Syrian features.

³ Contrasted by the Storm-god of the Vineyard, who straddles the interface between such communities.

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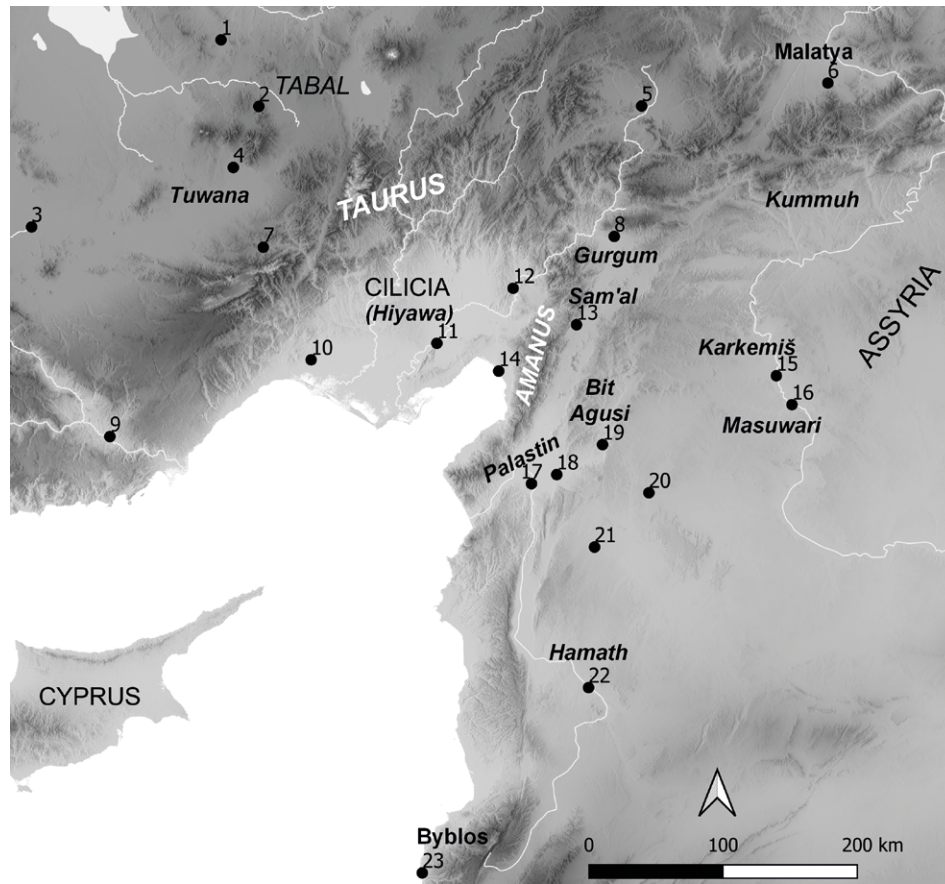
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Due to increasing agreement that Greek *Kybele* and Phrygian *Matar* (*Kubileya*) were not western derivatives of Kubaba based on historical and art historical analyses (Roller 1999; Hutter 2017; 2021, see esp. 315 note 114), and now a linguistic argument even for Kubaba's disassociation from Lydian *Kufaws/Kuwaws* and Greek *Kubebe* (Oreshko 2021)⁴, we limit our investigation to the Syro-Anatolian region (Fig. 1), where Kubaba's identity is less questionable, and extend our search into the Levant more tentatively. From this corpus, it will become clear that the cults of Kubaba did not evolve in any linear fashion within the region, nor can the cults of any particular locale be ascribed to any single source. However, certain regional tendencies seem to illustrate boundaries that limit the interaction between local cults of Kubaba, such as the Taurus range, and specific avenues for the transmission of cultic concepts, for instance along the Upper Euphrates.



Key sites

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1) Ovaören | 6) Arslantepe-Malatya | 11) Sirkeli | 16) Tell Ahmar | 21) Tell Afis |
| 2) Göllüdağ | 7) Porsuk | 12) Karatepe | 17) Tell Taynat | 22) Hama |
| 3) Türkmen-Karah. | 8) Maraş | 13) Zinçirli | 18) Çatal H. | 23) Byblos |
| 4) Kınık H. | 9) Kilise Tepe | 14) Kinet H. | 19) Ayn Dara | |
| 5) Karahöyük-Elbistan | 10) Tarsus | 15) Karkemiş | 20) Aleppo | |

Fig. 1. General map of the study area with key Iron Age sites and regions. (Graphics: Alvise Matessi).

⁴ Contra Laroche 1960 and Haas 1994.

2. Kubaba's many cults

The cult of Kubaba, best known for its connection with Iron Age Karkemiš, was active already in the Late Bronze Age Hurrian cultic landscape of Cilicia and northwest Syria. Onomastics with the theophoric element are known from Alalakh from as early as the 17th or 16th century BC, with increased popularity in the 15th century BC (Laroche 1960, 116). Several Hittite rituals provide evidence for Kubaba's role in the cults of Kizzuwatna, and a variety of other Hittite texts confirm her presence in Karkemiš, already paired in some cases with the tutelary deity Karḫuḫa (Hutter 2017, 114-15). Continued interactions between these regions almost certainly resulted in an amalgamation of Levantine, northern Syrian, and southern Anatolian influences in the Syro-Anatolian region in the post-Hittite period, and evidence for the prominence of one tradition or another, alongside specific innovations, can be found in the various local hypostases of the Iron Age.

During the Iron Age, these cults continued to spread throughout the Syro-Anatolian region, where Kubaba is invoked in various capacities, suggesting a number of local or regional cults. And while the cult of Kubaba is perhaps most explicitly dominant at Karkemiš, where it was central to the kingdom alongside those of Tarḫunza and Karḫuḫa as a sort of divine triad (Hawkins 1981), it should not be imagined as the source of the cult in all Iron Age references to the deity. For instance, as Hutter has recently suggested, Tabolean texts appear to reflect a primarily Kizzuwatnean tradition, pairing Kubaba with other deities from that pantheon, and only secondarily reflecting the influence of Karkemišean traditions (2017, 116). With that in mind, the following sections aim to define the local hypostases of the goddess best known from Karkemiš with her many aliases and corresponding roles within the cults of the Syro-Anatolian regions.

In Karkemiš, by the beginning of the 10th century BC, the local cult of Kubaba was already thriving and the goddess herself was invoked alongside the Storm-god in support of Ura-Tarḫunza, the Great King of Karkemiš (KARKAMIŠ A4b; also on KH.11.O.400 Stele of Suhi I). Around the same time, Kubaba acted alongside her likely consort Karḫuḫa as litigator in curse formulae (KARKAMIŠ A14b+a). Later in the same century, a divine triad of Tarḫunza, Karḫuḫa, and Kubaba appears to formalize during the reign of Katuwa, together acting to sacralize his royal power, legitimate his rule, and provide consequences for those who oppose him, all spelled out upon the urban monuments of his domain (KARKAMIŠ A11a, A11b+c, A12). While these deities could also act in various pairs or individually with relatively equal status (KARKAMIŠ A2+3, A13d), Kubaba's particular importance is demonstrated by references to her temple (KARKAMIŠ A23, A26a1+2), likely located atop the acropolis (Woolley 1952, 210), seemingly only matched by that of the Storm-god, and by her distinct title: Queen of Karkemiš (KARKAMIŠ A20a1+2, A25a).

While we lack certain evidence for the 9th century Karkemišean cult of Kubaba, the rich corpus of 8th century sources suggests a continuity of the institution with only minor innovations made by individual rulers. For instance, the inscriptions of Yariri include similar variable groupings of Tarḫunza, Kubaba, and/or Karḫuḫa, but interestingly with the addition of the Sun-god in an equal position, perhaps an expression of the ruler's personal beliefs; in each case, these gods are invoked in support of Yariri's position or for the benefit of the royal family, with Kubaba addressed individually on multiple occasions (KARKAMIŠ A6, A15b, KARKAMIŠ stone bowl).

Similarly, Kamani explicitly credits Karḫuḫa and Kubaba for legitimating his succession, building a temple and 'honored precinct' for Kubaba, Queen of Karkemiš, in

much the same way as his ancestor; he even suggests a regional importance of Kubaba's cult, justifying his building project as a place for other kings and lords to come worship his tutelary goddess (Stele of Kubaba by Kamani: KA31+A30b1-3; Marchetti and Peker 2018). Likewise, Kamani frequently invokes the divine triad as litigators for his curse formulae, but at this time with a broader range of concerns: not only matters of royal power, but also administrative concerns, such as the sale of homes or estates, or a city charter (CEKKE, KARKAMIŠ A4a, A25b). The remaining references to Kubaba from Karkemiš, mostly dated between the 9th and 8th centuries BC, all attest to a similar role and position of the deity (KARKAMIŠ A21+A20b, A13a-c, A15e, A18e, A18i-j, ANKARA, KÖRKÜN)⁵. In Karkemiš, Kubaba was a top-tier goddess, who was active in royal legitimation and power and as guarantor of royal proclamations and, in the 8th century, in matters of urban administration.



Fig. 2. Stele of Kubaba commissioned by Kamani and discovered at Karkemiš (Marchetti and Peker 2018, 91 Fig. 16)

⁵ In one inscription upon a stone bowl, tentatively dated to the 9th century BC, Kubaba is found grouped between Karḫuḫa and Santa in the curse formula (BEIRUT stone bowl), and an inscribed stele base dated roughly to the 10th-9th centuries BC refers to the dedication of a granary to Kubaba (KARKAMIŠ A30b).

Visual representations of Kubaba from Karkemiš are limited (Fig. 2). From the late 10th century BC, a relief from the Processional Way depicting a seated goddess upon a recumbent lion, wearing a polos and veil, and holding a mirror and pomegranate, can be confidently ascribed as representing Kubaba, though no inscription names her as such (Orthmann 1971, F/7b). Another roughly contemporaneous relief depicts a goddess with a decorated horned polos and veil, and holding a pomegranate; while the other hand is missing, many have proposed that it may have held a mirror (Orthmann 1971, C/3). However, another goddess on a nearby relief is represented in much the same way, except with a pomegranate and a stalk of grain, suggesting that she may be a separate deity altogether, perhaps the Hittite Maliya or the unspecified local Grain-god(dess) (Orthmann 1971, C/1 with discussion on 276-77)⁶. A last stele from around the 10th century BC depicts Kubaba with a prominent horned polos but no veil; she holds a mirror and pomegranate and stands below a winged sun disc (Orthmann 1971, Biricek 1)⁷. From the later kings of Karkemiš, only Kamani's Stele of Kubaba, thus dated to the first half of the 8th century BC, assuredly depicts the goddess; there, she stands in a long robe and ornamental jewelry, crowned by a decorated polos with hair falling below, and she holds a decorative mirror in her left hand (Orthmann 1971, K/1; Marchetti and Peker 2018). A final relief from Karkemiš, probably dated to the 8th century, depicts a seated goddess holding a mirror and wearing a highly decorated robe and veil, perhaps also Kubaba (Orthmann 1971, K/6). In all, it appears that, at Karkemiš, Kubaba's defining features include her polos, long robe, and veil, as well as a mirror and, often, a pomegranate held in her hands. Her posture – standing or seated – may have some meaning, but none that the current evidence can suggest. Her relationship with the lion is likewise nondescript, except perhaps for its symbolism of royal power, as suggested by Lynn Roller (1999, 49).

In the Masuwarean tradition of nearby Tell Ahmar, at least for the period of king Ḫamiyata around end of the 10th century BC, Kubaba appears to have a much less prominent role. While she still acts as royal legitimator and litigator of curse formulae, the goddess so important at Karkemiš appears in the middle or end of long lists of deities, and never in a primary position. On the other hand, her proximity to Karḫuḫa in almost all Masuwarean inscriptions suggests that this local cult of Kubaba is still reflective of Karkemišan traditions, if not the hierarchy of the pantheon (TELL AHMAR 1, 2, 6, ALEPPO 2).

Maraş provides little insight into the cult of Kubaba, with only a single explicit reference to the goddess. However, this undated and poorly preserved fragment of an inscribed block mentions Kubaba alongside Karḫuḫa, clearly in the Karkemišan tradition (MARAŞ 10). Additionally, the monuments of Maraş provide a robust corpus of examples of elite mortal women wearing the same polos and veil as Kubaba, and even holding a mirror in several cases, in their depictions on funerary stelae (Orthmann 1971, B/7 [MARAŞ 2], A/2 [MARAŞ 12], B/14, B/19, and MARAŞ 15). The attire of these women appears to reflect a standard style of dress for elite women, whether mortal or divine, and likely only serve as an indicator of gender and social status, not in any way

⁶ See also Hutter (2021, 295), for a discussion of the possible persistence of Maliya in the region of Tabal; also, Lovejoy (forthcoming) and Matessi and Lovejoy (forthcoming) for the role of the Grain-god in the Syro-Anatolian region.

⁷ The stele was later joined with a base inscribed with KARKAMIŠ A30h due to the proximity of find spots and the fit of the tenon and mortise hole.

connected to any specific personal identity (Fig. 3)⁸. Together with the mirror, however, this iconographic assemblage seems to imply some connection with the goddess, perhaps suggesting that Kubaba had some chthonic role at least in the areas where her semiotic markers were attached to the deceased.

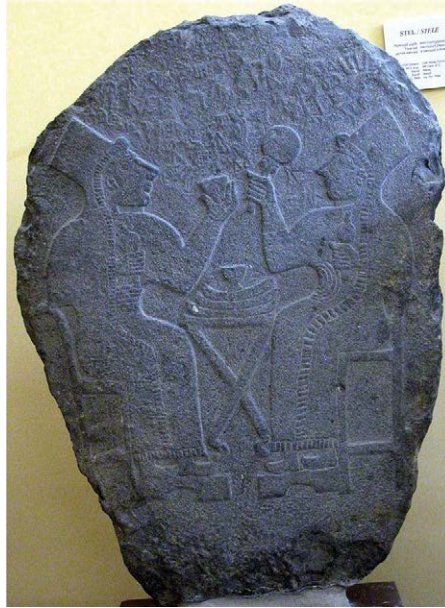


Fig. 3. Funerary stele from Maraš depicting two women with attributes common to Kubaba (Tayfun Bilgin, www.hittitemonuments.com, 1. 77, last visited 02/08/2023)

The situation in Malatya is even more epigraphically limited, but pictorial evidence provides some insight. Most informative is a late 10th century BC rough stone stele bearing an incised Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription and a depiction of two deities beneath a winged sun disc (Fig. 4). The two figures are identified as Karḫuḫa, depicted standing astride a lion and wielding a spear and what might be lighting or grain stalks, and Kubaba, who sits in a chair upon the back of a bull, wearing a polos and veil, and holding a mirror before her (Orthmann 1971, B/4). The pairing immediately connects the monument with the Karkemišean cultic milieu. The peculiar writing of Karḫuḫa's name, including the sign CERVUS₂ before the syllabic spelling, however, has led Hawkins to suggest that this might be a Karkemišean form of the Stag-god Runtiya (MALATYA 13). This would indicate, then, that the Malatyan cult of Kubaba – if the conceptualization of her consort is any indicator – is reflective of a hybrid tradition that we may call “Luwo-Karkemišean” as it combines elements of Luwian religion of Anatolian origin with cults peculiar to Karkemiš. Perhaps this form of cult emerged in Malatya in response to the regional dominance of Karkemiš. While no other references to Kubaba are known from Malatya, it is worth noting that two other reliefs depict non-divine women wearing a polos and veil, appearing quite similar to Kubaba. One woman,

⁸ The polos and veil might be a necessary semiotic component of representations of Kubaba (or even the Phrygian Matar or Greek Kybele), but they are in no way indicators of her exact identity. Other iconographs or epigraphs are needed for any certain attribution.

identified as Prince(ss) Tuwati, pours a libation for a goddess before her upon a relief orthostat (Orthmann 1971, A/7; MALATYA 6), while another woman is depicted in at a mortuary repast on a fragmentary monument, unfortunately any object she might have held is lost in a break (Orthmann 1971, B/3; MALATYA 2). These two examples further demonstrate the problem of identifying Kubaba or aspects of her cult: while the former is clearly labeled as a royal figure, the latter appears to have been labeled with a secondary inscription, confusing the matter even more, but perhaps connected to Kubaba through a chthonic role, as suggested in Maraş.



Fig. 4. Stele of Kubaba and Karḫuḫa from Arslantepe (Tayfun Bilgin, www.hittitemonuments.com, 1. 77, last visited 02/08/2023)

Kummuḫean Kubaba provides another example of a mixed local cult active around the end of the 9th century BC during the reign of Šuppliliuma. While the goddess is found individually in some inscriptions (BOYBEYPINARI 1, 2), she is also commonly found alongside, among other local deities, Runtiya. This deity appears to fully replace Karḫuḫa in the more Luwo-dominant cultic milieu, albeit still recognizing the role of the tutelary consort of the Karkamisean Kubaba (ANCOZ 1, 5, 7, and probably KÂHTA 1). Her role remains that of litigator in most cases where context is preserved, though she is also the target of offerings and dedications by several royal figures. Even more striking is the title that accompanies her name in every attestation from the region; in Kummuḫ, she is known always as *Ala-Kubaba* or *Lady Kubaba*. While this is reminiscent, in some regard, of her title ‘*Queen of Karkemiš*’, it may also provide a conceptual connection to several southern hypostases of the deity, namely the *Divine Queen of the Land of Palastina* and *Pahalat of Hama*, to which we will return later. Only one fragmentary relief depicting the goddess is known from the region, but it appears to depict her in standard garb, seated, and holding a pomegranate in the one preserved hand (Orthmann 1971, Ancuzköy 1).

The Tabalean Kubaba is known from sources dating to about the second half of the 8th century BC. In most cases, the inscriptions are reflective of a Hurro-Luwian cultic tradition, likely a product of the strong presence of the Late Bronze Age cults of Kizzuwatna just beyond the Taurus (Hutter 2017, 116). Kubaba is most often found alongside Tarḫunza, sometimes paired with Ea, and occasionally with other traditionally Hurrian gods like Hebat, Šarruma, and Alašuwa. She mostly functions as a litigator in curse formulae (KAYSERĪ, KARABURUN), in one case through her agent “the ḪASAMI-dog of Kubaba” (KULULU 1), but is also found receiving dedications following a royal building project, perhaps including shrines(?) (ÇİFTLİK; perhaps something similar in KULULU 5), and in a late inscription providing favor to a local ruler (BULGARMADEN). While these examples are suggestive of a primarily Kizzuwatnean tradition behind the local cult of Kubaba, one Tabalean reference to Kubaba of Karkemiš in a curse formula of a subject of Wašušarma is indicative of cultural interaction in the cultic sphere (SULTANHAN), perhaps expressed through a Karkemišean elite transplant or an extension of the Karkemišean cult into the Tabalean population.



Fig. 5. Stele appearing to represent Kubaba from Domuztepe in Cilicia (Tayfun Bilgin, www.hittitemonuments.com, v. 1.77, last visited 02/08/2023)

While those regions from the Upper Euphrates to the South-Central Anatolia appear to represent a continuum of cultic traditions as they concern the goddess Kubaba, with Karkemišean and SC Anatolian poles, the territories south of the Taurus and along the Northern Levant are indicative of transformations beyond the Hurro-Anatolian realm. Firstly, Cilician Kubaba is known only from a single 9th century BC stele from the site of Domuztepe (Çambel and Özyar 2003, 149-56). The stele is not inscribed,

but it depicts the goddess in her long robe and veil, probably with polos, though the head is damaged (Fig. 5). She holds a mirror out in front of her in her left hand, which, together with the winged sun disc positioned above her, clearly marks her as Kubaba, whether known by that name or another. The only other deity known from the site is the Storm-god, depicted on another slightly smaller stele. In this early stage, it is difficult to say much of the cult of Kubaba, but nothing suggests external influences, and one might hazard to guess that the local Kizzuwatnean cult persisted with little change well into the Iron Age. However, it appears that around the second half of the 8th century BC, Kubaba may have lost her local significance. With the new cosmopolitan cultic landscape best illustrated by the monuments at Karatepe and characterized by a mixture of Luwian and Phoenician cultural features, it would seem that the Hurro-Anatolian goddess had no place in the Ḫiyawan pantheon, as she was not included in any inscription, nor represented in any later sculptural monuments of the polity.

Across the Amanus, the Samʿalian inscription on the Ördekburnu stele, dated around the end of the 9th century BC, refers to a Kubaba of Aram, most probably reflecting a resilience of a local, northern Levantine tradition, which is supported by the goddess' pairing with Rakib-El, the dynastic god of Samʿal (Lemaire and Sass 2013). Younger has recently proposed that this manifestation of Kubaba should be identified with a cult centered at Arpad, the capital of Bit-Agusi (2020, 6), perhaps suggesting a regional prominence. The late 8th century BC funerary stele of KTMW from Zincirli appears to reflect the continued evolution of this cult in Samʿal; Kubaba is invoked at the end of a list of deities and immediately before the 'soul' of the deceased, all of whom are described partaking in a funerary feast to sacralize the space (Pardee 2009). From this limited evidence, it would seem that, within the Samʿalian context, Kubaba's role was largely concerned with the afterlife, perhaps imagined as a chthonic deity in a subordinate position to those connected with kingship and important cities. It would also seem, however, that Kubaba was visually defined by the same standards as in the north (Fig. 6); at Zincirli, she appears to be depicted twice on relief orthostats wearing a robe, veil, and horned polos, and holding a mirror and pomegranate in her hands (Orthmann 1971, B/13b). While dress alone would not be enough to suggest this identification, the horn upon her polos and Kubaba's divine implements leave little doubt of her identity.



Fig. 6. Orthostats from Zincirli possibly depicting Kubaba flanking a Storm-god (Tayfun Bilgin, www.hittitemonuments.com, v. 1.77, last visited 02/08/2023)

In Bit-Agusi, the cult of Kubaba appears in the Levantine cultic context as she stands alongside Reshef in the text of an 8th century BC inscribed stele fragment from Tell Sifr, in the vicinity of Aleppo, thus lending support to Younger's hypothesis of an Aramaic cult of Kubaba located nearby. Above the text are remnants of a relief preserving feet standing upon the hindquarters of a quadruped, perhaps a bull referring to the Storm-god, or even a stag referring directly to Reshef, named in the text (Tocci 1962, 21-2; Niehr 2014, 155; Bunnens 2006, 110). Without further evidence to distinguish more local hypostases, we might imagine the cults of Sam'al and Bit-Agusi being one and exhibiting expressly Levantine or Aramaic characteristics, quite separate from the traditions of Karkemiš or South-Central Anatolia⁹.

As early as the 11th century BC, the northern Levantine kingdom of Palastina appears to have been interested in the cult of Karkemišan Kubaba, attested in a fragmentary inscription from the temple of the Storm-god at Aleppo (ALEPPO 7). Only one other reference to the deity comes from the Amuq Plain: a roughly 9th-8th centuries BC inscription on a building block found in secondary context, which invokes Kubaba and the Ḫarranean Moon-God as litigators in a curse formula, two deities often paired in the north Syrian tradition of Karkemiš, but not explicitly linking the traditions; the author of the inscription appears to be a Runti(ya)wari, or the like, providing an alternative connection through the theophoric element to the SC Anatolian traditions (TULEIL 2)¹⁰. In any case, these incredibly fragmentary inscriptions, separated by several centuries, can provide little insight into the development of the cult of Kubaba in this region.

This limited corpus of monuments may be expanded, however, if we accept a suggestion of Annick Payne: the Divine Queen of the Land may be a local manifestation of Kubaba, found within the northern Levant between the Amuq and the area just north of Ḫama. This is supported by the inclusion of the same theonym within the name of the author of the SHEIZAR inscription: Kupapiya, meaning "Kubaba gave (her)" or "the one of Kubaba" (Payne 2012, 47 not 40). Following the same line of thought, Younger has identified that the Kubaba of Aram on the Ördëkburnu stele – another funerary stele for a woman named Piya, here lacking the theophoric element of the previous name – served in much the same way as the Divine Queen of the Land (Younger 2020, 6)¹¹.

⁹ It is worth noting, however, that the treaty of Assur-nerari V and Mati'ilu of Arpad mentions Kubaba and Karḫuḫa late in a list of divine witnesses in the curse. Importantly, the Levantine deities follow Mesopotamian ones, suggesting the hierarchy intended by the scribe or commissioning authority (SAA 2, 2). While this treaty is relevant in understanding the wider Near Eastern worldview of the cult of Kubaba in the Syro-Anatolian region, its etic perspective provides only the view of the Assyrians, not any reality in the region of the northern Levant.

¹⁰ The Esarhaddon Vassal Treaty from Tell Tayinat mentions Kubaba and Karḫuḫa of Karkemiš at the end of divine witnesses to the curse, and immediately before the natural forces (SAA 2, 15, §55; Lauinger 2012, 119); this is mirrored in the version from Nimrud, notwithstanding the other internal differences to the god list (SAA 2, 6, §55). As with the Assyrian-Arpadite treaty, these texts are only indicative of the deities that the Assyrians believed to be important in the region, not those that were actually worshipped.

¹¹ Younger also points out the possibility that the Divine Queen of the Land may refer to the goddess Ba'alat, the principal deity of Early Iron Age Byblos and central to the 9th century BC cultic landscape of Hama (2020, 6 note 23). However, Orthmann's early caution for identifying this deity with some better-known deity, namely Kubaba, should be noted, and simply understanding the Divine Queen of the Land as "die – locale – Hauptgottheit" is certainly the safest option (Orthmann 1971, 286). One should also not exclude the possibility that the Divine Queen of the Land could have been interpreted differently by individuals or communities with varied cultural backgrounds.

The Divine Queen of the Land is an apparently local deity whose cult was perhaps connected directly to the kingdom of Palastina. This particular goddess is only mentioned by this name in three Hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions from the region: SHEIZAR and MEHARDE, both dated from the 10th to early 9th century BC¹², and KIRÇOĞLU, dated to the second half of the 8th century BC. The earlier inscriptions both appear on funerary stelae for Palastinean royalty. SHEIZAR describes the mortuary affairs of Kupapiya, the wife of Taita, the Hero of Palastina, and invokes the Divine Queen of the Land as the litigator of the curse formula. The stele upon which it is inscribed is undecorated. The MEHARDE inscription begins by identifying the stele as the goddess, likely referring to the female figure depicted on its front (Fig. 7), standing upon a couchant lion and beneath what appears to be a winged sun in the form of the Anatolian Hieroglyph SOL (hieroglyphic sign *191)¹³, and declaring that it was made for her by Taita, presumably the same as that in the previous inscription, and possibly represented by the smaller figure in the scene, standing upon the lion's head. The female figure's iconography parallels best the characteristics of the Levanto-Egyptian goddess Qudshu/Qedeš, associated with the region already in the Late Bronze Age Canaanite pantheon at Ugarit; her naked standing posture, her Hathor-headdress, the lion beneath her, and the objects (probably flowers) held in her raised hands are all in accordance with images of the goddess found throughout the eastern Mediterranean, perhaps suggesting that Qudshu/Qedeš was the visual inspiration for the depiction of this local goddess (Cornelius 2008, 94-9; Cornelius 2010). The Divine Queen of the Land also serves as litigator in the concluding curse formula (Hawkins 2000, 417). The KIRÇOĞLU inscription is challenging to interpret in its entirety, but clearly states that an unknown person commissioned the statue upon which the text is inscribed for the benefit of the Divine Queen of the Land, who then honored the commissioner and raised him above his brothers (Hawkins 2000, 384). The statue itself, missing its upper half, appears to be a representation of the goddess. A fourth monument might be added to these three; while uninscribed, the fragmentary Lady of Tayinat statue from the Palastinean capital may, in fact, depict this Divine Queen of the Land¹⁴. In any case, it is clear that this goddess was a chthonic deity, connected with the Palastinean royalty in the underworld¹⁵.

Additional support for this assertion may come from an 8th century BC inscribed funerary stele discovered at Karkemiš, which invokes a "Divine Lady of the Earth". While Hawkins has noted the distinction between Land and Earth as possibly signifying that these are two different deities (2000, 184), they appear to serve the same role as chthonic deities; perhaps the Karkemišan example is an interpretation of the northern Levantine cult.

¹² Palaeographic criteria strongly suggest a dating after the early 10th century and before the late 9th century (Hawkins 2003; d'Alfonso and Payne 2016), while historical information – namely a series of royal names known from local and Assyrian sources of the 9th century – suggests that these monuments should date no later than the early 9th century BC. Until further evidence comes to light, we leave open their dating to the period between ca. 975-875 BC, though we agree that the latter end of that range may be more likely. See Giusfredi 2018 for a summary of the debate on the dating of these two monuments with references therein.

¹³ Compare with the better-preserved winged sun on Orthmann 1971, Malatya D/1 (MALATYA 14).

¹⁴ Of course, it is also possible that the statue represents a deceased queen, perhaps the same Kupapiya memorialized in the SHEIZAR inscription.

¹⁵ Written TERRA.DEUS.DOMINA (KARKAMIŠ A5a), as opposed to the Divine Queen of the Land, written (DEUS)REGIO-*ni-si-i* (MAGNUS.DOMINA)*ha-su-sa₃+ra/i-sa* (SHEIZAR).



Fig. 7. Funerary stele of Taita (II) of Palastina depicting the Divine Queen of the Land (Hawkins 2000, Pl. 225)

With that, we have reached our last possible alias of Kubaba, which is Canaanite Ba'alat (or Pahalat in hieroglyphic Luwian). While Younger has pointed out the possibility that the Divine Queen of the Land may refer to the goddess Ba'alat, the principal deity of Early Iron Age Byblos and central to the 9th century BC cultic landscape of Ḥama (2020, 6 note 23; also Hutter 2021, 303), it may be more likely that both goddesses were individual hypostases of a similar conceptualization of divinity (Pongratz-Leisten 2021). In Ḥama, Pahalat serves in a preeminent role around the mid-9th century BC, in much the same way as Kubaba in Karkemiš. The king Urḫilina constructs a temple for this important goddess and aims to increase revenue for her (HAMA 4). He fills²/constructs²/dedicates² a granary to her (HAMA 8), and erects a stele for her upon the foundation of a city (RESTAN, QAL'AT EL MUDIQ, HINES). And from the available evidence, it appears that Pahalat was only matched in importance with Tarḫunza (HAMA frag. 1). While this Hamathite cult of Pahalat appears to closely parallel the Karkemišean cult of Kubaba, it is also reflective of a connection with Ba'alat of Byblos, both through their name and through their apparently tutelary role within their respective cities. A further connection might be drawn to Ba'alat in the northern Levantine cult of the Divine Queen of the Land; namely, the figure in the MEHARDE stele is depicted nude with what appears to be a "Hathor-headress", a feature characteristic of Ba'alat and a product of her longstanding translation with the Egyptian Hathor.

While many have sought an underlying deity beneath the title of Lady, e.g., Aštarte, Asherah, Hathor, Qudšu/Qedeš, Aphrodite, or Dione (Xella 1994, 196-7; Cross 1997, 28 note 90), it has also been suggested that Ba'alat is treated as a proper name in the Phoenician (Zernecke 2013). This would suggest that Ba'alat is not masking another "real" deity, but stands herself as a locally important goddess with independent traits. However, her adoption by other communities in connection with other deities may suggest certain shared characteristics that allowed for such broad translatability, in the same way that the Divine Queen of the Land, *Ala-* (or Lady) Kubaba, Kubaba of Aram, and Kubaba

of Karkemiš may all have stood as unique local or regional deities, easily interpreted by one community or another as their own version of a shared conceptualization of divinity.

Unfortunately, little else is known about Ba'alat and her cult, whether from Byblos or within the Canaanite mythological traditions more broadly. One might seek insight into Ba'alat's cult through her connection with Hathor. Since both Egyptians and Byblians syncretized the two goddesses as early as the second half of the 3rd millennium BC (Scandone Matthiae 1987, 401-03; Hart 2005, 65), it stands to reason that they shared fundamental characteristics beyond appearance (Cross 1997, 34 note 129), and likely similar cultic roles. Hathor's primary roles in Egypt were connected with the well-being of the ruler and with safe passage to the underworld (Scandone Matthiae 1987, 405; Xella 1994, 206; Hart 2005, 66; Smith 2017, 251-55, 384-89), paralleling in many ways the main functions of certain Kubabas south of the Taurus and perhaps also those of Ba'alat. If, in fact, Ba'alat was a goddess connected with both kingship and the underworld, then it is possible that a connection formed between these regional goddesses based on shared roles, providing a foundation for goddesses like the Divine Queen of the Land and Pahalat of Hama, invoked through a title that is also a name, to be conceived with duties to the deceased and to those in power, respectively. These divine Ladies might then have been interpreted through the mixed communities of the northern Levant, with the (re) emergence of a Kubaba of Aram, coopting the imagery and name of Kubaba, and the cultic role of the underworld deities to the south¹⁶. On the other hand, the primary role of Pahalat of Hama as tutelary deity and protector of kingship may indicate a stronger connection with the Karkemišan conceptualization of the premiere goddess of the Iron Age.

3. The cultural milieu

The dynamics informing the local persistence, regional circulation and (re)interpretation of Kubaba and her cults during the Iron Age were certainly manifold and complex, but in part they ought to play within broader trajectories of interaction which can be best evaluated against other cultural horizons. The political landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean emerging from historical sources of the Iron Age is largely the result of the disaggregation following the collapse of the Hittite empire, around the early 12th century BC. In particular, the Kubaba cults as analyzed above mostly circulated within Syro-Anatolian milieus, reproducing in a diverse array of local scenarios several inherited Hittite traits especially reflected in iconographic traditions and the continued use of the Luwian Hieroglyphic script and language¹⁷.

However, beyond this general continuum, major fault lines can be individuated within the Syro-Anatolian complex. The Taurus, in particular, represented during the Iron Age an imposing watershed, separating on either side different linguistic, artistic and material cultural horizons. While many avenues point in this direction, a most visible divide crossed the linguistic landscape: In fact, the admixture of Luwian and West Semitic languages characterizing southern environments did not spread to the north of the Taurus belt, where epichoric inscriptions up to the 6th century attest only Luwian and Phrygian¹⁸. Nonetheless, on the background of this general separation,

¹⁶ See Lovejoy 2023 for an expanded evaluation of these developments in the cultic institutions and communities of the Iron Age northeast Mediterranean.

¹⁷ On the definition of the "Syro-Anatolian cultural complex", see Osborne 2021.

¹⁸ With the only exception being the Luwian-Phoenician bilingual of İVRİZ 2. For a more detailed treatment, see Matessi and Lovejoy (forthcoming).

some indirect contacts between north and south certainly occurred. A particularly productive channel of contacts can be especially individuated in the Euphrates area. Karkemiš yielded the only known Phrygian inscription – a single personal name – outside Central and West Anatolia¹⁹, in addition to a few specimens of Central Anatolian Iron Age ceramic wares of the Alişar IV type, otherwise absent south of the Taurus²⁰. The monuments of Karasu and Malpınar, on the Euphrates valley close to the Atatürk Dam, are the sole representatives in the south of a Syro-Anatolian artistic tradition – the rock-cut reliefs – otherwise typical of Central Anatolia (Ehringhaus 2014, 95-105). More to the north, the Iron Age levels of Arslantepe, the site of Malatya, have yielded mixed ceramic assemblages with both southern and northern influences, including Urartian, Phrygian, Cypro-Phoenician and Syrian Red Slip wares (Manuelli 2013)²¹.

This range of archaeologically documented contacts finely resonates with historical information drawn from textual sources, that cumulatively depict a range of contacts between Mesopotamia, Syria and the Anatolian highlands passing through the Euphrates valley. On one hand, Assyrian military accounts from the 11th century on consistently mention Malatya or nearby areas as a regular stage en route to Tabal or Urartu. On the other hand, documented relationships between Malatya and the south were also strong. Tiglath-pileser I of Assyria (1114-1076 BC) asserts that he marched to Malatya in a northward movement, after sweeping the Levantine coast and Syria (RIMA 2 A.0.87.4, 24-33). A similar itinerary was perhaps followed some centuries later by Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC), who received tributes from the “lands of Ḫatti”, i.e. Syria, and then Malatya on his way to Tabal (Yamada 2000, 209-10)²². Malatyan rulers of the 11th century attested on hieroglyphic inscriptions claimed dynastic ties with Karkemiš, and their successors in the 8th century participated in military coalitions including several Syro-Levantine principalities²³.

Alongside the Taurus and its stark divide between north and south, the makeup of the Syro-Anatolian world was also shaped by a natural frontier separating east and west, represented by the Amanus mountains. Compared with the Taurus, this natural frontier is much less visible in the material cultural sphere. In fact, multiple interconnections crossed the Amanus range through the Iron Ages, on the foreground of a gradual change in local horizons from coastal areas to inner Syria (Lehmann 2008). However, stronger differences between eastern and western scenarios are encountered in the linguistic milieu. Epichoric Iron Age inscriptions from Cilicia include Luwian-Phoenician bilinguals as well as monolingual Phoenician inscriptions (Yakubovich 2015). By contrast, east of the Amanus, Luwian intermingled in many locales with Aramaic dialects, whereas Phoenician seems to have played only a minor role. The rulers of Sam'al, modern Zinçirli, on the eastern foothills of the Amanus range, used Aramaic and the related Sam'alian language for all their inscriptions, with the one exception of Kulamuwa's stele, bearing a Phoenician text (KAI 24)²⁴.

¹⁹ HP-01. See Obrador-Cursach 2020, 16.

²⁰ D'Alfonso *et al.* 2022.

²¹ We do not delve here into the question of the re-emergence of Luwian Hieroglyphic traditions in Tabal that, according to some commentators (e.g., Summers 2017), might owe to interactions with Karkemiš and/or Malatya.

²² For an analysis of possible routes through Malatya in the Iron Age, see Di Filippo and Mori 2018.

²³ In the early 8th century, an anonymous king of Malatya had joined a coalition of Syrian and Transeuphratic states headed by Hazael of Damascus against Zakkur of Hamath (Younger 2016, 476-81). Some decades later, during Tiglath-pileser III's reign, the Malatyan king Sulumal joined forces with Urartu in a coalition including Arpad, Ḫatti (i.e., Karkemiš) and Gurgum (RINAP 1 35, I 21'-25').

²⁴ On the mixed linguistic situation in Sam'al, see now Giusfredi and Pisaniello 2021.

4. Concluding remarks: the many cults of Kubaba in their areal contexts

These dynamics of areal interaction and frontier formation inspire some considerations on the possible trajectories of expansion of Kubaba in the Iron Age (Fig. 8). To begin with, the seemingly marginal role that Kubaba played in Iron Age Cilicia, with the possible sole exception of Domuztepe, stands in stark contrast with the importance that this deity had in Kizzuwatnean traditions of the 2nd millennium BC. Unless determined by the chance of findings, this pattern becomes significant if compared with the natural and cultural frontiers drawn by the Taurus and the Amanus. Therefore, we can tentatively suggest that the Luwo-Phoenician environment characterizing Cilicia was comparatively less receptive towards Kubaba than the Luwo-Aramaic milieus featured east of the Amanus. This conclusion would resonate well with observations mentioned above about the little currency of Kubaba cults in Phoenician religious traditions in general, which in turn might account for a Phoenician “negative” influence on the persistence of Kubaba cults in Cilicia as well.

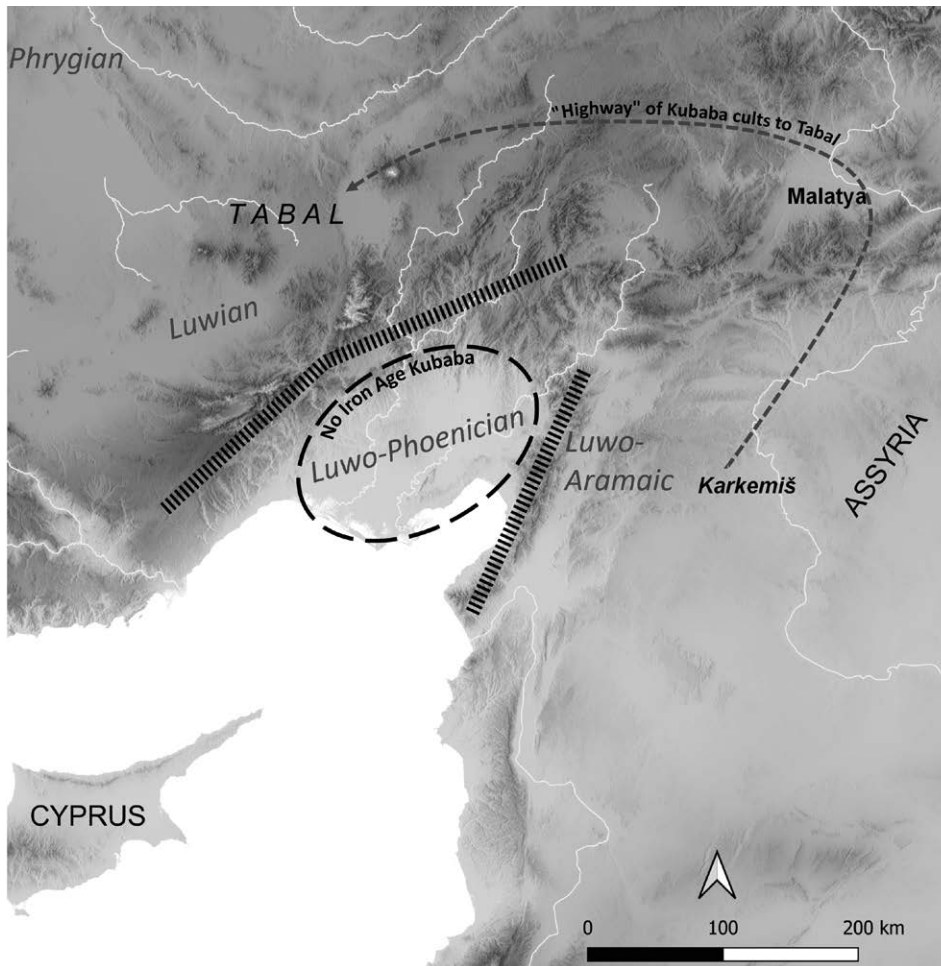


Fig. 8. Resumptive map of the diffusion of the Kubaba cults in the Syro-Anatolian world, with main linguistic areas and cultural frontiers. (Graphics: Alvise Matessi).

A second observation, by contrast, regards the prominent status that Kubaba seems to have enjoyed in Tabal. As mentioned above, the characters of the Tabalean cult of Kubaba are suggestive of a local resilience or (re)emergence of Kizzuwatnean traditions from the 2nd millennium BC. It is possible, however, that interferences with the core area of Kubaba in Syria and the Euphrates area during the Iron Age further fostered its cult in Central Anatolia. Synchronic inputs from abroad might indeed be suggested by the mention of the Karkemišean Kubaba together with other Syrian cults in the curse formula of SULTANHANI. This possibility would tempt us to envisage a sort of “highway” of the Kubaba cults that, following the trajectories examined above, connected Tabal to Karkemiš and the Syrian Euphrates through Malatya. Religious imports deriving from these possible contacts might have hybridized with inherited characters, according to mechanisms of cultural formation that are a trademark of Iron Age interactions in the area.

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