

# The influence of the Hurrian religion in Urkesh (Tell Mozan) on the belief of societies from the ancient Near East during the Bronze Age



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## ABSTRACT

*This study sheds light on the kingdom of Urkesh (Tell Mozan) at the end of the third millennium BC. AD as a prosperous capital, its population ranged from ten thousand to twenty thousand people. Moreover, although its power has diminished over the centuries, it remained a sacred center during the rise of the Mitanni kingdom at the beginning of the fifteenth century BC. AD, and ended the Hurrian independence until then. The influence of the Hurrian traditions continued on the Hittites in Anatolia, were "B. G. Collins" indicated the extent of the influence of the Hurrian religion on them through the practice of their own rituals, especially in the "Kizwatna" region in southeastern Turkey. It continued as their sacred center, Unchanged over at least a thousand years after the Urkesh period. The study relied on the descriptive and analytical approach, such as referring to the vocabulary and terminology used. In addition to clarifying its role in spreading its faith through the analytical aspect, and in the conclusion the results of the research on the Hurrian religion, its transition from Urkesh as a major center, the integration of Hurrian religion, and the role of Hurrian deities.*

## Keywords:

Urkesh; Hittites; Kumarbi; ābi; Kourotophic

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**Open Access** This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. نُشرت هذه الدراسة في ذُورِة كان الأثرِحية للأغراض العلمية والبحثية فقط، وغير مسموح بإعادة النسخ والنشر والتوزيع للأغراض تجارية أو ربحية.

## Introduction

Urkesh (Tell Mozan) was the de facto site and capital of a mythical kingdom, and a sacred religious center for the Hurrians (Wilford 1995: 1-5). As the name Urkesh (Tell Mozan) is not only part of the titles of kings, or the name of an actual place, but it is the mythical homeland of deities or a symbol of a spiritual essence that refers to different things at different times, as is often the case in the texts of the ancient Near East (Robinson 2006: 106-107). Among them are the Hittite and Hurritic texts that talk about a sacred city called Urkesh (Tell Mozan).<sup>1</sup> The mention of the Hurrians came in the most important sacred books, during later periods, as the Bible mentioned about the Hurrians in Genesis Chapter 36: Lines 20-21.<sup>2</sup> And the nature of their housing in the mountainous areas, which indicated the Hurrian population and the nature of their residence in the mountainous areas, which revealed that their capital is buried under a modern Syrian village called "Tell Muzan", which confirms the importance of the place and its sanctity (Map. 1) (Ashley 2008: 32). The high hill and its connection with the surrounding lands formed a deliberate attempt to design the city, because the central part of the city was a religious center since its inception in the late Chalcolithic period around 3500 BC. M, it was the nucleus in which various rituals take place (Buccellati 2013: 151).

### The influence of the Urkesh,s religion (Tell Mozan) on the neighborhood

The religion of Urkesh (Tell Mozan) had a great influence on many other centers of civilization through what was received from Hurrians texts and records in locations outside it, where the Hurrians and recital texts dealt with talking about a sacred city called Urkesh (Tell Mozan), but at the beginning scholars could not determine it is believed to be mythical, but after a long time scholars have

<sup>1</sup> Genesis chapter 36, line 20: These sons of Saer al-Hurri lived on the land: Lotan, Shubal, Sibon, and Anah. Genesis chapter 36, line 21: Dishon, Issar, and Dishhan. These are the princes of the Hurrian, the Banu Seir, in the land of Edom. (Edom: It is a region located between southern Palestine and the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Edomites settled in an area that was characterized by a mountainous nature, as did the Hurrians in Mesopotamia and northeast Syria) (Anthony Fekry, The Old Testament).

<sup>2</sup> Genesis chapter 36, line 20: These are the sons of Seir al-Hawri, inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shubal, Sibon, and Anah. Genesis chapter 36, line 21: Dishon, Issar, and Dishhan. These are the princes of the Hurri, the Banu Seir, in the land of Edom. (Edom: It is a region located between southern Palestine and the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Edomites settled in an area that was characterized by a mountainous nature, as did the Hurrians in Mesopotamia and northeast Syria) (Anthony Fekry, The Old Testament).

revealed that it is an ancient Hurrians city (Patricia 2005: 76).

### Its influence on the Hittite religion

The Hittite state controlled large areas of Anatolia and northern Syria from the seventeenth century to the twelfth century BC. M, Many archives of clay tablets, written in cuneiform and several other languages, were left, and some of them included texts that had a Hurri influence that were included in the religious context and Hurrians rituals (Klock 2007). It is a mixture of diverse cultural currents, including features of the Indo-European peoples, and adopted beliefs and practices including Hurrian, Akkadian and Sumerian. In the capital, "Katusha / Bogazkoy", many myths were found about Hurrian deities. As mentioned earlier for an old rhetorical version of a Hurrian myth called "The Silver Cantata. It is a legend that refers to an ancient people known as the Hurrians in the city of Urkesh (Tell Mozan) (Ginneken 2000: 266-268). "Kenneth" says Previously little was known about the Hurrians," but their writings often speak of the main deity "Kumarbi" and Urkesh (Tell Mozan), the city in which he was supposed to live. It was a very sacred place (Chang, K. 1995). Historians have documented the influence of Hurrian deities on Hittite deities, and it is believed that the Hittites glorified the Hurrian dynasty (Fig. 1) (Giorgieri 2013: 44), Their religious texts refer to Urkesh (Tell Mozan), the homeland of "Kumarbi," the father of Hurrian deities (Ahmed 2012: 204).

And in " Kizwatna."<sup>3</sup> As the influence of the Hurrian religion was clear, as most of its deities were of Hurrian origin, in addition to the phenomenon of practicing religious rituals in it within pits dedicated to its practice, Which was affected by Hurrian through the ābi pit that preceded it, as well as the presence of pigs in the pits of "our Kizwatna" and the like in Urkesh, indicating the practice of Hurrian rituals there (Collins 2001: 235). From the foregoing, it is noted that the Hurrian myths formed part of the Hittite culture, especially with regard to religious ideas and beliefs, during the second millennium BC. M, Among them is the legend "Kumarbi", which was published in the Hittite Archives, which describes the struggle for divine kingship between "Kumarbi" and " Teshub " (Beckman 2011: 95-102). Its place is represented by the sacred sanctuary of Urkesh (Tell Muzan) represented by the temple, the seat of the

<sup>3</sup> It is a Hittite town in southeast Anatolia, during the period of the modern Hittite Empire, in the second millennium BC. M. It practiced the Hittite religion and included the gods of many Syrian deities. (Ginneken 2000: 268).

ancient Hurrian deity "Kumarbi", the father of the fairy deities (Pfälzner 2008: 428). For his sacred role among deities, the recital texts include the myth of "Kumarbi" and his struggle with deities (Beckman 2011: 95-102). Through the foregoing, it fully confirms the depth of the Hurrians penetration of the Hittite culture and beliefs, and in this city we may find evidence that will enable us to distinguish between later elements of cultures (especially religious beliefs) which are in fact Hurrian's contributions.

The Mesopotamian gods complex included gods of Hurrian origin and included the most important incoming Hurrian gods (Teshub: the god of storms), (Khabat: cohort Teshub), (Kumarbi: god of fertility and the underworld), (Shushka: Ishtar the Hurrian) and (Simigi: god the sun).

### The impact of the *abi* pit

Some recital religious texts describe rituals that have a strong influence on the Hurrian faith, which makes it possible to communicate with the other world, which is a pit used as corridors through which the deities of the underworld are summoned, in the Hurrian Hittite texts, and these rituals had a relationship with the dead and deities were summoned for purposes of purification and sacrifices (Ahmed 2012: 205). The Hurrian term *abi* is used in reference to a pit used to communicate with deities in the underworld by sacrifice and offering offerings to them, The Hittite scribes used different words for pits in their texts, and there is the Hittite term "hattsar" used for sacrificing pigs within these pits. There is also archaeological evidence of structures / buildings of similar use in "Khatusha", the capital of the Hittites, including a single domed room known as "südberg" built for use as a channel or pathway to the underworld. **KAS KAL-KUR** and at the back of the room / where the sun god appears / Uses simple pits, presumably to make offerings. The temple is associated with a vast sacred pool, which may have been constructed to replace the river banks near it, to perform the Hurri-Hittite ritual. The pits near the temple were lined with rocks, and were associated with rituals as the al-Abi pit, in addition to containing two small bronze axes, and models of tools that were used to dig the pit lying nearby (Collins 2004: 56).

There are other words that express the underworld, which is the Hittite word *dankuiš daganzipaš*, meaning "the dark black earth," and it refers to the world of deities in the other world, which is an underground place, The place is ruled by the gods of the sun at night after its descent before

it rises again in the morning, and so the performance of ritual communication with her took place throughout the night, late in it or at the break of dawn. The sun gods on earth were considered guides for the spirits who transport the souls of the dead to a new abode in the other world, and communication takes place all the way through the sun deity, which describes the rituals of the Hittites, how the mother, i.e. the sun gods on the earth, comes to the soul of the dead to transfer him to a new residence (Collins 2004: 224). There are texts mentioning the rituals of the Hittites: When a great calamity occurred, as in "Khatusha" such as the death of the king on the third day, the king would be cremated, perhaps inspired by a Hurrian origin, and on the sixth day his bones were burned where he was wrapped in linen and transported to a shrine and offerings were offered to him and what he needed in The Other Life, where it was believed that the soul of the dead lived in the underworld (Wright 2007: 196). A pit lined with stone was also found in Ugarit (Ras Shamra), and a question was raised about the nature of this pit, and in a publication issued by "M. J. Suriano" discussing the palace pit in Ugarit within the context of *abi* pit in Urkesh (Tell Mozan). He concluded that its construction was performed to perform rituals as in Urkesh (Tell Mozan) (Suriano 2009: 114). The previous study indicates the extent of the influence of the Urkesh doctrine (Tell Mozan) on other sites, in the north of the Hittites, and the southwest of Ugarit in the second millennium BC. M, and in the south in Mesopotamia, in reference to its distinctive location and central role in the region.

### The embodiment of fertility or the mother goddess

Perhaps the most important thing that distinguished Urkesh (Tell Mozan) from other sites from the religious point of view, was the veneration of the status of women as masters and goddesses. This pays tribute to its main role in the Kingdom at various levels, including religious ones, as it embodied a special status for it through special icons that represent it and represent its symbolism, including:

**Kourotrophic icon:** Kourotrophic: It is an adult inclined to a human female or a deity or a nanny carrying a child in the Bronze Age in the Near East. Whereas, men do not appear in the Kourotrophic because they were not photographed with their children, as the female model of the Kourotrophic has appeared, and several examples have appeared, including: In Mesopotamia, only two clay paintings

and sculptures dating back to the late Akkad and Ur III were seen in a view close to a half goddess holding a child, and the scenes are consistent with the birth deities being one in the pictures and the other half showing a human woman carrying a child, most of which is unknown. In Syria, a model of a nurse or a nurse appeared as deities, the most famous of which is an ivory tablet from Ugarit-i, which indicates a winged god. And in Anatolia, the "Kourotrophic" was more varied and unique, like a small gold necklace from the sun god "Arena" with the child in Urkesh (Tell Muzan), which is derived from two seals, Queen **Uqnîtum** is shown carrying the Crown Prince on her lap (Fig. 2), and it is clear that this scene indicates the power of the queen vis-à-vis the king, The "Kourotrophic" was usually assumed to depict the mother and child and thus represented somewhat the "great goddess mother" or image of fertility (Budin 2011: 8-9). It is a unique view of its kind, characterizing the role of the Queen in Urkesh (Tell Mozan).

### **The widespread religious celebrations and festivals are part of the Hurrian culture**

There has been no study referring to religious ceremonies in Urkesh (Tell Mozan), but one aspect of this celebration can be assumed from a study of "P. D, Wright" dealing with the rituals of Hittite religious ceremonies with a Hurrian influence, including major festivals, including the Mass, where the King and the High Priest They preside over festivals and travel to many shrines in various cities to make offerings to local deities (Wright 2007: 193). This celebration can be linked to Urkesh (Tell Mozan) through the seal imprint of the priests and the king as they offer a bull for sacrifice, and it is associated with the northern Hittite regions through the dress and the style of the seal (Fig. 3) This view refers to the spiritual role of the ruler's function as the correct performance of rituals and ceremonies that are On it depends the harmony of the relationship with the idol. It was a custom that was also widespread in Mesopotamia, where special celebrations were held and sacrifices were made on the holy days of a certain god, and in these places the seasons of harvesting and shearing of wool were associated with the holding of festivals and processions, and the main feast was the New Year feast "Akita" in "Babylon and Assyria". And all the deities of the surrounding areas are invited to attend, and detailed rituals remain, such as dressing the statue, laying the foundation for a building, and commencing rituals in Babylon at dawn, then

offering offerings and reciting prayers and epics (Barendse 1993: 25-27). In Urkesh (Tell Mozan), in one of the seals, there was a scene of people offering a ball of wool in front of the king, perhaps associated with a celebration of the days of harvest and shearing of wool, as in Mesopotamia (Fig. 4). Many texts dealing with celebrations of attending deities were mentioned, and they were of Hurrian origins, the most important of which are:

### **The saga of the release of prisoners, the release of slaves and the recovery from debts**

A Hurri and Hittite text has been found from around 1400 BC. In Hatusha, an epic was engraved on it containing the release of prisoners, the release of slaves and the relief from debts. The religious aspect of this celebration represents the meeting of the idol Teashup with the sun god "Allani" to eat the meal of the primitive gods who were exiled to the underworld where they participate to the right of "Teshub" as a celebration (Bremmer. 2007: 37), It is a habit that the inhabitants of Mesopotamia had, as they believed that the life of deities was similar to the life of human beings, except for death and supernatural abilities (Al-Ahmad, S. S. 2013: 9). In other words, the myth of primitive deities was associated with rituals that were reflected between masters and slaves. The custom of changing clothes was a ritual in ancient times, and one of the most important sources of entertainment and fun (Bremmer. 2007: 38-39). As these clothes were changed and replaced with clean clothes during ablution in the rites of penance and royal purification in Mesopotamia during the Sargonic and Assyrian periods (Bashir 2017.). All of these details can be linked to Urkesh (Tell Mozan), given that most of the texts are of Hurrian origin and the celebration takes place in the presence of deities whose origin is from Urkesh (Tell Mozan).

### **Conclusion**

The aforementioned study on the religion associated with other sites of the Hurrian character supports the idea of moving from Urkesh (Tell Mozan) to it, as it is the main center and the religious capital of the Hurrian who practiced all rituals. And it spread to other civilizations due to the advantage of its strategic location as the crossroads of main roads between high mountains, flat areas and different civilizations, making it a main meeting place for different ideas and cultures. This facilitated the arrival of religious beliefs and ideas of Urkesh (Tell Mozan) to various parts through the passage of

many merchants, intermediaries, and others, which made its religion and beliefs have a strong influence on the contemporary sites surrounding it or during the later periods. It follows from it:

Religion in Urkesh (Tell Mozan) is a deeply-rooted religious system since the beginning of the early Bronze Age, and the emergence of the Hurrian religion was a deep spiritual revival in its era because it was a comprehensive religious system, and then it contained most of the seeds of the roots of the religions that appeared after them.

The religion in Urkesh (Tell Muzan) was integrated and had the same origins, as Kumarbi, the god of the kingdom, was a major, local, comprehensive deity surpassing the gods of most other civilizations, However, this phenomenon did not lead to the alienation of other deities from their position, but rather remained among the gods, as a result of the adherence of their first worshipers or the religious status they occupied in their minds.

Appendices (maps and figures)



Map. 1 Hurrian Diffusion During the Bronze Age.

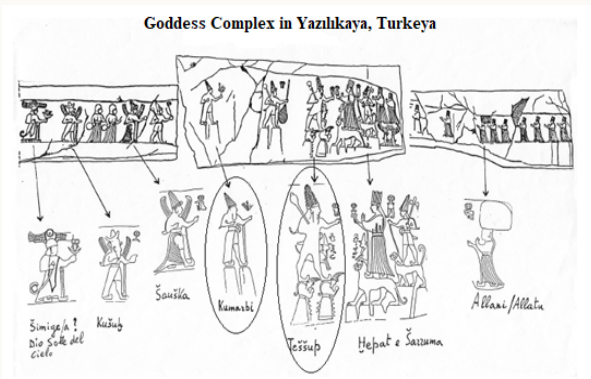


Fig. 1 A view depicting the complex of deities in the Yazılıkaya inscriptions in Turkey, among them

the nymph deities, Kumarbi, Teshub and Khabat (Giorgieri 2013: 44).

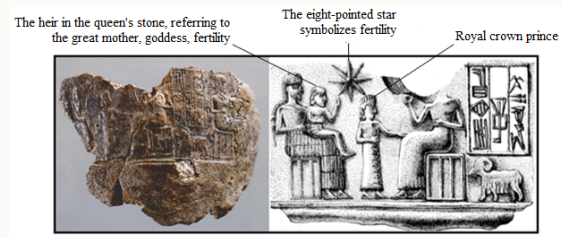


Fig. 2 The crown prince touches the king's knee opposite the queen, Queen **Uqnîtum's** seal (Jerome. M. 1996).

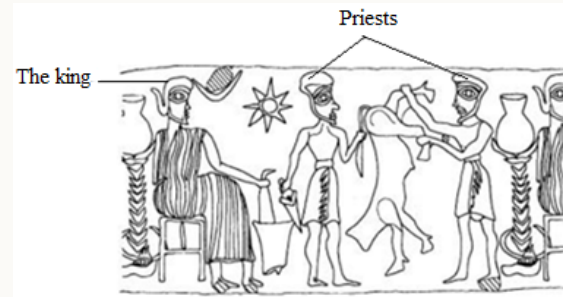


Fig. 3 A scene of the sacrifice of a bull before the king in Urkesh (Tell Mozan) (Ahmed 2012: 225).



Fig. 4 Imprint of a seal belonging to King Tubkish, showing a ball of wool or string on the outstretched hand of an attendee

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### ملخص المقال:

تأثير ديانة الخوريين في أوركيش (تل موزان) على عقيدة مجتمعات من الشرق الأدنى القديم خلال العصر البرونزي

د. روبرت خلف

المديرية العامة للآثار والمتاحف – سوريا

تسلط الدراسة هنا على مملكة أوركيش (تل موزان) في نهاية الألف الثالث ق.م كعاصمة مزدهرة، تراوح عدد سكانها ما بين عشرة آلاف إلى عشرين ألف نسمة. وعلى الرغم من أن قوتها قد تضاءلت على مرّ القرون، إلا أنها بقيت مركز مقدّس أثناء صعود (المملكة الميتانية) مطلع القرن الخامس عشر ق.م، وأنهوا الاستقلال الخوري حتى ذلك الحين. واستمر تأثير التقاليد الخورية على الحيثيين في الأناضول، حيث أشار "B. G, Collins" مدى تأثير ديانة الخوريين عليهم من خلال ممارسة طقوس خاصة بهم وخاصة في منطقة "كيزواتنا" جنوب شرق تركيا. حيث واصلت كمركز مقدّس لديهم. دون تغيير على مدى أكثر من ألف سنة على الأقل بعد فترة أوركيش. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي والتحليلي، كالإشارة إلى المفردات والمصطلحات المستخدمة، وخريطة تبرز انتشار الثقافة الخورية وصور توضيحية للمملكة، بالإضافة إلى إيضاح دورها في نشر عقيدتها من خلال الجانب التحليلي، وفي الخاتمة نتائج البحث حول الدين ذات الطابع الخوري، وانتقاله من أوركيش، كمركز رئيس، وتكامل الدين الحوري، ودور المعابدات الخورية.

كلمات افتتاحية: أوركيش؛ حثيين؛ كوماربي؛ الآبي؛ الكوروتوفريك