ACROSS CULTURES, ACROSS LANGUAGES. INTERCONNECTIVITY IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE UGARIT

ENTRE CULTURAS, ENTRE LÍNGUAS. INTERCONECTIVIDADE NA IDADE DO BRONZE TARDIA UGARIT

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The spread of cuneiform writing and of the linguistic and literary traditions associated with it represents one of the key moments in the cultural history of the ancient Near East. It is a complex and multi-faceted process that can unquestionably be regarded as an excellent example of cultural transfer. The long duration and the state of preservation of the sources enable us to follow this process as a whole and also to focus on specific aspects. The aim of this article is to identify the significance of cultural transfer in the Akkadian texts of Ugarit, especially in relation to the origin of the phrase "according to the loyalty of one's heart".

Keywords: Interconnectivity. Cuneiform. Levant. Ugarit. Akkadian. Language

A difusão da escrita cuneiforme e das tradições linguísticas e literárias associadas representa um dos momentos-chave da história cultural do antigo Próximo Oriente. Este complexo e multifacetado processo pode ser considerado um excelente exemplo de transferência cultural. A sua longa duração e o estado de preservação das fontes permitem-nos acompanhar este processo na sua totalidade, mas também concentrar-se em detalhes específicos. O objectivo deste artigo é identificar o significado da transferência cultural nos textos acádios de Ugarit, mais especificamente no que respeita às origens da frase "de acordo com a lealdade do coração de alguém".

Palavras-chave: Interconectividade. Cuneiforme. Levante. Ugarit. Acádico. Língua

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1. Introduction

For the formation and development of ancient Near Eastern societies, the interactions and interconnections that occurred at various levels were fundamental elements that contributed enormously to the overall shape of the area under discussion. Whether we are talking about relations between individuals within a single settlement, between towns and cities, or between the great empires of the ancient world, these have always been reflected to a greater or lesser extent in the actual shape of its material and intellectual values.

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Although the diffusion of cultural elements was continuous, both in prehistory and in history, it is possible to determine the chronological scope of at least some of these elements. Among the elements that can be reliably dated and that had a direct impact on both the cultural and social development and the final shape of the cultural environment of the ancient Near East, we can definitely include the spread of cuneiform writing and the linguistic and literary traditions associated with it.

Geographically, this phenomenon was initially characterized by an outward movement from the primary cuneiform centers of Mesopotamia to areas that could be described as secondary or peripheral in terms of cuneiform use. However, this process was quite complex, and in the internal dynamics that followed, these categories of primary and secondary centers were largely blurred. Some of the centers that we could identify in the early phase as secondary centers then underwent further development and partially assumed the role of the original primary centers. Thus, they became the new primary centers of further cultural development and expansion. Their role was particularly important for those regions that had not had direct contact with the original primary centers in the previous stage, and thus came into contact with the original traditions primarily through these newly formed centers in the periphery. However, we cannot imagine that the cultural elements encountered here did not undergo some transformation. Thus, the resulting form was undoubtedly composed of both the original elements and the elements typical of these newly formed centers. This dynamic development contributed significantly to the variety of new forms that these traditions took. From a methodological point of view, then, it is cultural transfer that allows us to unravel the various layers of this multifaceted phenomenon.[1]

2. Cuneiform Writing in the West

The beginnings of the processes by which cuneiform writing and its associated textual tradition began to spread from the Mesopotamian centers to the periphery can be traced as early as the second half of the third millennium BCE. However, it was not until the second half of the second millennium BCE that the use of cuneiform writing reached its greatest geographical extent in the western periphery, spreading as far as Egypt.

And this process has also played a fundamental role in shaping the linguistic history of the region. One can look at this complex and multifaceted phenomenon from many different angles, focusing on the mobility of words, concepts, and ideas. However, each of these must be studied in terms of its individual stages, because it is the individual steps in this chain, their sequence, and the nature of their interdependence that constitute the crucial moments that determine the final outcome. Therefore, it is not only the moment of the agent's creation and its final form in the new environment that must be taken into account, but also the individual mechanisms of transmission. Each time an agent enters a new environment, a new era begins. After entering the new environment, the agent begins to function within the new framework, gradually adapting and transforming its character,

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[1] See especially Agnetta and Cercel (2021); De Moor et al. (1996); Dick (2012); Espagne (1999); Middell (2016); Stockhorst (2010); for the ancient Near Eastern context consult especially Madreiter (2016); Momrak (2005); Pongratz-Leisten (2002).

but at the same time retaining certain elements of its original nature. Over time, it is
exposed to its new environment and their interaction is mutual. The resulting character of
the newly formed agent then exhibits considerable fluidity, incorporating elements from
both the original homeland and the new environment. As a result, the original
characteristics of both traditions are largely obliterated in the new form. Cultural transfer
is therefore a crucial tool for shaping key cultural elements.

In the realm of the ancient Near East, such a core agent is represented by cuneiform
script, which serves as an essential vehicle for the transmission of cultural and literary
traditions in multiple languages with a long history of transmission.[2] Beginning in the
later part of the third millennium BCE, and then with greater intensity during the second
millennium BCE, cuneiform also plays an increasingly important role in the peripheral
areas surrounding the Mesopotamian alluvium. The key to understanding the principles
accompanying the formation of cultural structures in the peripheral regions are two
closely related aspects of the cuneiform script: the transfer of technology, encompassing
the processes of making and writing the clay tablets, and the transfer of words and ideas,
that is, the contents of these tablets.

From the beginning of the second millennium BCE, cuneiform writing became the
preferred means by which the administrators of the peripheral centers communicated and
recorded economic transactions. In Anatolia, cuneiform script was adapted to write the
Hittite language (van den Hout, 2009), and before the middle of the second millennium
BCE, texts written in Akkadian were also used in the southern parts of the Levant (Cohen
2019; Horowitz et al., 2018; Rainey 1996) and even as far as the eastern edge of the Nile
Delta (van Koppen & Lehman, 2012; van Koppen & Radner, 2009). Thus, in the second
half of the second millennium BCE, Mesopotamian cuneiform served as the main vehicle
of written communication throughout the Near East, as evidenced by documents
preserved in the archives of important political and cultural centers in the Levant (Ugarit,
Emar, Alalakh, etc.), Anatolia (Hattuša, Šapinuwa, etc.), or Egypt (Tell el-Amarna,
Qantir; Müller 2010). The Mesopotamian cuneiform script maintained such a privileged
position or role until the final phase of the Bronze Age at the turn of the 12th century
BCE, when political and economic changes led to a complete transformation of
commercial and cultural relations in the western part of the cuneiform world. Until the
end, however, the spread of knowledge of cuneiform writing and related textual traditions
can be traced through lexical and scholarly texts,[3] and documents discovered at various
sites show us how the training of cuneiform scribes took place at the edge of this world,
allowing us to study the interconnectedness of individual writing traditions.

In terms of historical importance, as well as with respect to the number and state of
preservation of the discovered texts, the Egyptian site of Tell el-Amarna (ancient
Akhetaten) can be considered one of the most important centers of cuneiform tradition
located on the western periphery of the cuneiform world. It is at this site located in Middle
Egypt that an institution that served as both a scribal school and the archives of

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[2] For the role of Sumerian in the western peripheries consult especially Viano (2015, 2016).
[3] See especially Horowitz et al. (2018), Huehnergard (1987), Huehnergard and Van Soldt (1999), Peterson
(2006), Roche (2008), Scheuchner (2012), Süel and Soysal (2003), van der Toorn (2000), Veldhuis (2015),
Weeden (2011).

correspondence of Egyptian kings of the mid-14th century BCE has been securely identified.[4]

3. Lexicon and Phraseology. Egyptianisms and more

One of the reasons why this collection of nearly 400 cuneiform documents is so important to us is its geographical scope and the relatively short period of time during which the texts found here were written. Covering an area from the centers of southern and northern Mesopotamia, through Anatolia or Cyprus, to the Levant and Egypt, these letters were written over a period of no more than 20–25 years, and thus uniquely reflect the cultural and linguistic situation of a very large region, but within a very limited window of time. However, this considerable geographical range also suggests the possible variability of these texts, which were produced in many places in the region, subject to the influence of local traditions, but which had to be limited to some extent so as not to impede mutual understanding of the message. The Amarna letters as a whole can thus undoubtedly be regarded as a typical example of the close interconnectedness of the world at that time, realized – in written form – by the use of the clay cuneiform tablet written in Akkadian.

Even within a single corpus, which is defined by the place where the texts, written in a very limited period of time, were found, we cannot speak of a linguistically homogeneous corpus. And this variability is so great that it has reached all levels of the language. This is most obvious, of course, in those cases where we also have texts written in a language that was commonly used in the places where these Akkadian texts were written, and thus provide us with a reference sample. At the same time, however, we must also take into account the historical and political context that influenced the formation of the content of written communication. In the case of the Amarna correspondence, this was primarily the extent and intensity of the influence of the Egyptian administration in the Levant.

Although the extent and intensity of this influence varied considerably from region to region, even over such a short period of time, we find the influence of Egyptian administrative or military terminology even in texts not written by scribes in Egypt.[5] Thus, the most frequent loanwords from foreign languages in these letters include terms related to both political and cultural aspects;[6] however, culturally conditioned expressions, such as the identification of materials and their quality, or the types of precious objects that often served as part of trade or diplomatic transactions, can tell us more about the origin of the scribe, since very few loanwords were used by scribes in other, non-native areas. An exceptional case, then, is the designation of Egyptian military

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[4] Izre'el (1997); Mynářová (2014).

[5] However, the same phenomenon, i.e. the penetration of military terminology in the form of lexical borrowings, can also be observed in the reverse case, i.e. when Egyptian was the targeted language (Schneider, 2008). For Semitic words in Egyptian texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, consult Hoch (1994).

[6] Albright (1946); Cochavi-Rainey (1990, 1997, 1998); Du Mesnil du Buisson (1935); Edel (1987, 1989); Lambdin (1953); Zorn (1991). A recent paper by Marwan Kilani (Kilani, 2020) draws attention to a hitherto neglected, albeit very crucial element, which is the relationship between sociolinguistic identities/naming practices in the Amarna letters and Egyptian imperialism.

units, "regular troops," literally "archers", in Akkadian *ṣābē piṭāti* from the Egyptian
pḏ.tyw, whose activities can be traced throughout the Levant. It is therefore not surprising
that their identification can also be encountered in texts of non-Egyptian origin. However,
such lexical borrowings are not limited to the Egyptian language, although they are the
most numerous (and visible).[7]

But it is not only the loanwords that shape the final form of the written message. So
far, researchers have been able to identify a number of phrases that are directly related to
epistolary or literary expressions attested in Egyptian written documents. Among these
idioms we can include not only epistolary formulas that announce the role of the written
message delivered, but also exhortations to the Levantine rulers to be careful and to
properly guard the cities entrusted to them by the Pharaoh.[8] Other possible Egyptianisms
in the Amarna letters were pointed out by Chris Eyre (1976) or C. Grave (1980). And it
was C. Grave, who demonstrated the wider scope of these idioms by connecting selected
passages in Abi-milki's letter from Tyre (EA 147) to the Egyptian literary tradition. The
unusually high number of Egyptianisms in the letters from Tyre was also pointed out by
L. Siddall (2010), who was able to clearly link them to the religious environment of Egypt
at that time. And it was only recently that F. Zangani (2022), in his article devoted to the
study of the career of the high Amarna period dignitary Tutu, drew attention to another
possible Egyptian expression for "joy," reflected in the Akkadian text as "stretching of
your heart" (EA 167, l. 30).[9] Even from this brief survey of possible Egyptianisms –
which is certainly not intended to be an exhaustive list of evidence for this phenomenon
– it is clear that we cannot treat the Amarna letters as a single homogeneous collection,
and that we must also take into account other linguistic and cultural elements in order to
properly understand their content. But, of course, it is not only Egyptianisms that are
reflected in the final wording of each letter.[10]

4. Possible Ugaritism in EA 47?

Thus, a careful reading of the Amarna letters leads us to phrases that are not common in
the corpus and whose meaning is not entirely obvious at first glance. And just such a
phrase is found in one of the letters of Ugaritic origin.

The corpus of letters of Ugaritic origin is relatively small, comprising a total of five
texts (EA 45–49), but one of them is so fragmentary (EA 46) that the surviving remains
do not even allow us to reconstruct the main content of the message. In addition to letters
from the Ugaritic ruler Ammistramru (I) (EA 45) and his successor Niqm-Addu II (EA
49) to the Egyptian king, a letter from the queen of Ugarit to the Egyptian queen (EA 48)
is part of this collection. For the remaining two texts (EA 46, EA 47) the identification of
the sender is not preserved, although the preserved parts of both texts suggest that the

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[7] Singer (1983); Mynářová (2022).
[8] See "I have sent to you this tablet in order to say to you:", EA 99 (ll. 5–6); EA 367 (ll. 3–4); EA 369 (ll.
2–4); EA 370 (ll. 2–4). See also, KL 69:277 / Kumidi 1: 3–4; KL 69:279 / Kumidi 2: 3–5, Edzard (1969,
pp. 86–97); Edzard (1970, pp. 50–56); "Guard! May you guard the place of the king that is with you.",
Cochavi-Rainey (2011, p. 212); EA 99 (ll. 7–9); EA 367 (ll. 4–5); EA 370 (ll. 4–6); Liverani (1971).
[9] See also Liverani (1980) for possible intentional misunderstandings.
[10] Consult especially Liverani (1998, pp. 55–59).

Egyptian king was also the addressee of this message. It is in the relatively damaged letter of EA 47 that we encounter the unique phrase, i.e., "[in accordance with] the loyal<ty> of my heart" (EA 47, l. 21).

As noted above, the entire introductory passage of EA 47 (VAT 1693) identifying the addressee and sender of the letter is missing, but there is general agreement among scholars on the inclusion of this letter into the Ugaritic corpus. This consensus is then confirmed by the results of the petrographic analysis (Goren et al., 2004, p. 90). Fragmentary surviving lines (ll. 7–11) show that the sender is subordinate in relation to the addressee, and he emphasizes this subordinate status by stating that he is indeed a servant of the king, (His) Majesty (lit. "the Sun"), his master. At the same time, however, he also refers to the fact that his ancestors were already servants of the king's ancestors. The middle and best-preserved part of the letter reveals the main content of the message (ll. 12–21). This section contains the complaint of the king of Ugarit, who says that although he sent a messenger to the addressee, the king of Egypt, he was not properly consulted. He complains that the other royal envoys are being listened to, and the sender of the letter is then given a proper reply in the form of a tablet to be delivered by the royal envoy. However, his envoy did not receive any tablet containing the king's reply, nor did the king send a messenger to the Ugaritic king. The king of Ugarit concludes his complaint by saying: "[This is not in accordance with] the loyal<ty> of my heart." (l. 21, [*ú-ul ki-*]*ma* ˹*ki*˺-*it* UZU ŠÀ-*bi-ia*).[11] In the following passage, again very poorly preserved, the Ugaritic king then goes on to complain about the attention the Egyptian king apparently pays to the words of Ḫanya (ll. 22–29).

Although the question of loyalty, usually in the form of loyalty to the Egyptian king, appears relatively frequently in the Amarna letters, the phrase "loyalty of my heart" is attested in this case only. Knudtzon reads the relevant passage in EA 47 as "[…*n*]*ach* der [*Tr*]*eue* meines Herzens" (Knudtzon, 1915/1964, p. 315). Moran (1992, p. 119) translates it with a question: "[*Am I treated in accordance*] *with* the loyal<ty> of my heart?", and similarly also Liverani (1999, p. 286): "[Sono (forse) trattato] in conformità alla fedeltà del mio cuore?" and Rainey (2015, p. 377): "[This is not in accor]ance with the loyalty of my heart". Huehnergard, in his treatise on the Akkadian of Ugarit, devotes attention to this passage, and in particular to explaining the short form of *ki-it*, which he sees as either a scribal error (Huehnergard, 1989, p. 95) or a short form of bound form (Huehnergard, 1989, p. 95 fn. 216), although he seems to regard the scribal error as more likely (Huehnergard, 1989, p. 150 fn. 137). However, as with other authors, he does not address the meaning of this unusual idiom. And it is even so unusual that the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* gives only one other example of the combination of the Akkadian term *kittu* "truth, justice, correct procedures, loyalty, fidelity, correctness, normal state, treaty"[12] with the term *libbu* "heart, inside, mind, courage, wish, desire, preference, etc.".[13] The parallel is only to be found in the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon (Wiseman, 1958, p. 33, col. i, l. 51; p. 35, col. ii, l. 98). Chronologically and geographically, however, these are very distant parallels, and it is more likely that, although they are very similar idioms,

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[11] For the reconstruction of the beginning of the line and the translation, see Rainey (2015, p. 1391).
[12] *Sub kittu* A, CAD K, pp. 468–472.
[13] *Sub libbu*, CAD L, pp. 164–175.

they were created by separate developments. In conclusion, then, we must acknowledge that the Akkadian written material does not provide us with any useful guidance for understanding the idiom in question. It is therefore perfectly legitimate to look for possible parallels in the Ugaritic written documents.

The context in which the phrase occurs suggests a possible association with the legal environment. After the Egyptian king breaks established, we might say diplomatic, customs, the Ugaritic king responds by saying that such treatment is not in accordance with "the loyalty of his heart". The fact that the Akkadian term *kittu* can also refer to a legal provision in this type of text is well known (see above). However, no such parallel is found in the Ugaritic texts, and the most common term for a legal obligation is *mṣmt* "treaty, agreement" (*DUL*, 579). On the other hand, in the Ugaritic material we can encounter the phrase "in accordance with the king's heart" (KTU 7.63: 8 = KTU, 3ʳᵈ ed., 3.11: 8),[14] which is used in the sense "in accordance with the king's decision/wish/desire". Is it therefore possible that both traditions, the Akkadian and the Ugaritic, meet in the wording of EA 47? The final form of the phrase under discussion could then contain elements of both. Both a binding legal provision and an expression of the will and expectations of the ruler. On the one hand, a reference to a binding legal provision is a reference, but on the other, an expression of the ruler's will and expectations. It is just such a linguistic (but also conceptual) construct that we might assume in such a situation.

5. Conclusions

By the second half of the second millennium BCE, the Levant was intertwined with a network of land routes connecting major political and cultural centers within and beyond the region. At the same time, it was linked to commercial activities by maritime routes. The movement of people, ideas, and goods resulted in the creation of a heterogeneous, though closely interdependent, environment that shared many common elements. One such element was the communication system, which in its written form was realized primarily through clay tablets written in cuneiform script and using various forms of the Akkadian language. From a communicative point of view, therefore, we can describe the Levant, but also the surrounding areas in this period, not only as a cultural but also as a written continuum, created through cultural transfer and the development of common but also typically local traditions.

The Amarna letters, dating to the middle of the 14ᵗʰ century BCE, are the embodiment of such an interconnected world. From a linguistic and cultural point of view, however, it is a rather heterogeneous set of texts, with the resulting form of each text being strongly influenced by the linguistic and cultural situation of the environment in which it was written. One of the smaller collections are the letters from Ugarit (EA 45–49). One of these letters, EA 47, contains a phrase that has no parallel in any of the other texts in the Amarna corpus, nor in any other contemporary Akkadian written sources. The only possible parallel and source to the phrase in EA 47 (l. 21) "[This is not in accordance with] the loyal<ty> of my heart." ([*ú-ul ki-*]*ma ˈki`-it* UZU ŠÀ-*bi-ia*) is then the Ugaritic

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[14] Possibly a legal document; consult especially Márquez-Rowe (2006, pp. 47–48) and Pardee (2010).

expression "in accordance with the king's heart", which is attested in the legal text KTU 7.63: 8 = KTU, 3rd ed., 11: 8. Thus, this phrase can be considered a possible Ugaritism, whose use in Akkadian is restricted to the ancient city of Ugarit.

Abbreviations

EA   Tablet siglum, texts from Tell el-Amarna.

CAD Roth, M. T. (1956–2010) *The Chicago Assyrian dictionary.* The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

DUL Del Olmo Lete, G., & Sanmartín, J. (2015) *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Vols. 1–2, 3rd ed., translated and edited by W. G. E. Watson). Brill.

KL   Tablet siglum, texts from Kamid el-Loz.

KTU Dietrich, M., Loretz, O., & Sanmartin, J. (Eds.). (1995) *The Cuneiform alphabetic texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and other places* (2nd ed.). Ugarit-Verlag.

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