

## Comparing Agrarian Mythologies and Rituals: Adyghe and Anatolian Fertility Cults and Their Role in Ancient Eurasian Symbolic Transmission

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**Abstract:** This study explores the symbolic and ritual parallels between the agricultural and fertility cults of the Adyghe people and the religious practices of ancient Anatolian civilisations, particularly the Hatti and Hittites. The research aims to demonstrate that Adyghe spiritual traditions are not isolated but form part of a broader Eurasian religious continuum shaped by cultural diffusion and shared cosmological archetypes. Using a qualitative, historical-comparative approach, the study analyses mythological narratives, ritual texts, linguistic terms, and archaeological records drawn from both Adyghe ethnographies and translated Hittite sources. The findings reveal striking similarities: the thunder god who defeats serpent-like forces, the symbolism of sacred trees and animal skins, and springtime fertility rites aligned with agricultural renewal. These elements suggest a structural continuity in agrarian cosmology across regions and epochs. The research contributes to the study of indigenous religions and *ecospirituality* by highlighting how local rites preserve ancient symbolic systems and maintain environmental ethics rooted in spiritual cosmology. The originality of this study lies in its cross-cultural synthesis and structural comparison of ritual motifs, which uncovers historical and theological connections between the Adyghe and Anatolian traditions—an area largely overlooked in prior scholarship. By bridging cultural histories of the Caucasus and Anatolia, the study provides new insights into the transregional development of religious thought within ancient agrarian societies.

**Keywords:** Agricultural cults; Adyghe religion; Hittite mythology; ecospirituality; Eurasian cosmology.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi kesamaan simbolik dan ritual antara kultus pertanian dan kesuburan masyarakat Adyghe dengan praktik keagamaan peradaban kuno Anatolia, khususnya bangsa Hatti dan Hittite. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah menunjukkan bahwa tradisi spiritual Adyghe bukanlah sistem terisolasi, melainkan bagian dari jejaring religius Eurasia yang lebih luas yang terbentuk melalui difusi budaya dan arketipe kosmologis bersama. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif historis-komparatif, penelitian ini menganalisis narasi mitologis, teks ritual, istilah linguistik, dan temuan arkeologis yang bersumber dari etnografi Adyghe serta teks-teks Hittite terjemahan. Temuan menunjukkan kemiripan mencolok: dewa petir yang mengalahkan kekuatan chaos berbentuk naga, simbolisme pohon suci dan kulit hewan, serta ritual kesuburan musim semi yang terkait dengan siklus pertanian. Elemen-elemen ini mengindikasikan kesinambungan struktural dalam kosmologi agraris lintas wilayah dan zaman. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada studi agama lokal dan *ekospiritualitas* dengan menyoroti bagaimana ritus tradisional melestarikan sistem simbolik kuno serta memelihara etika ekologis yang berakar pada kosmologi spiritual. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada sintesis lintas-budaya dan perbandingan struktural motif ritual yang mengungkap hubungan historis dan teologis antara tradisi Adyghe dan Anatolia—sebuah wilayah kajian yang sebelumnya kurang mendapat perhatian. Dengan menjembatani sejarah budaya Kaukasus dan Anatolia, studi ini menawarkan wawasan baru tentang perkembangan lintas-wilayah pemikiran religius dalam masyarakat agraris kuno.

**Keywords:** kultus pertanian; agama Adyghe; mitologi Hittite; ekospiritualitas; kosmologi Eurasia.

## 1. Introduction

Agricultural and fertility cults are one of the most prominent aspects of traditional Adyghe (Circassian) religion. The primary deity in this belief system is Thagaledj, the storm and agriculture god, who is highly revered due to his association with agrarian life cycles and meteorological phenomena (Marston et al., 2022). These religious practices not only reflect a spiritual belief system but also demonstrate a deep, historically rooted connection between the Adyghe people and the land, seasonal rhythms, and ecological balance. According to recent demographic data, about 23% of the population in the Republic of Adyghea identify as Adyghe, with significantly higher proportions in certain districts such as Teuchezhsky (65.82%) and Shovgenovsky (62.88%), where these traditions remain vibrant (Chernin, 2024). One notable archaeological finding is the aerial burial ritual associated with the storm god Shibla, documented at over ten archaeological sites in the region, which indicates that these beliefs have ancient and widespread roots extending beyond local boundaries (Beckman, 2013).

The persistence of such rituals in a context where the majority of the population has adopted other faith traditions underscores their resilience as a form of intangible cultural heritage. From an academic perspective, these practices offer a valuable case for cross-cultural religious studies, particularly in tracing symbolic continuities and transformations across Eurasia. Practically, they hold significance for heritage preservation policies, as they embody ecological ethics, identity formation, and intergenerational transmission of spiritual knowledge. Examining these traditions, therefore, is crucial not only for understanding Adyghe religiosity in its historical depth but also for situating it within broader comparative frameworks of agrarian cosmology and indigenous spirituality.

Although the majority of Adyghe people now practice Sunni Islam (Lyagusheva, 2005), some communities continue to uphold their indigenous beliefs, including agricultural and fertility cults, which are honored through annual rituals. These religious practices share striking similarities with rites among the Dene (Sino) peoples of Eurasia and North America in the third millennium BCE, with over 30% of recorded rituals exhibiting similar symbolic elements, underscoring the transregional dimension of this religious heritage. A sociological survey conducted in 2000–2001 revealed that only 35% of individuals from traditionally Muslim families in Adyghea identified as adherents of Islam, with just 10% actively following Muslim prescripts, and only 8% having read the Qur'an (Cvetkov & Khanakhu, 2004). This suggests a relatively low level of strict adherence to Islamic practices, indicating that many Adyghe people maintain a strong connection to pre-Islamic spiritual traditions, despite the predominance of Islam in the region.

In a broader historical context, calls for the decolonization of the Black Sea coast—now controlled by Russia—are gaining strength, especially through territorial claims made by the Circassian national movement. This movement serves as a reminder of the genocide and deportation of the Circassian people by Russian conquerors in the 19th century (Beckman, 2013). These events emphasize the strong connection between national identity and the spiritual cultural heritage that has been preserved over centuries. Even though only a small portion of the Circassian population remains in their ancestral homeland, these traditional beliefs continue to be a core part of their identity, underscoring the resilience of indigenous religious practices in the face of historical and modern-day challenges.

Previous research on Adyghe religious myths and rites can be classified into three main categories: religious symbolism and ancient belief systems, agrarian and seasonal rites, and epic narratives alongside socio-cultural practices. Firstly, studies on Adyghe religious symbolism have emphasised the significance of the *Tau* symbol, representing the Supreme Deity (*Thye/Theshue*), and its relation to ancient Middle Eastern and European religious cultures, which suggest a possible shared proto-monotheistic origin (Kagazezhev, 2024). Sacred symbolism is also evident in studies on Lake Khuko as a ritual site and relic of syncretic belief systems (Shtybin, 2023). However, these studies tend to be descriptive and have yet to structurally connect with agrarian cults of other ancient civilisations.

Secondly, several studies have explored seasonal rites such as *Ilesyshye zablekygu* (Spring Festival), which marks the Adyghe New Year and serves both agrarian functions and mythical meanings (Asfar & Maryet, 2024). Nonetheless, these studies remain limited in explaining the historical parallels or

continuities between Adyghe agrarian practices and fertility rites in other ancient cultures such as the Hatti and Hittites, especially in terms of cosmological structure and archetypes. Thirdly, various works have investigated the narrative and performative dimensions of Adyghe tradition, including *dzheguako* (ritual mantras rich in moral value) (Unarokova, Sokolova, & Khakunova, 2023), *Nart sagas* (heroic mythologies) (Dzhapua, 2020), and symbolic practices in music (*shikapshina*) and death rituals (Ashkhotov, 2018; Pashtova, 2022). While these studies successfully reveal ethnographic and aesthetic aspects, they have yet to bridge symbolic structures across cultures from a broader religious-agrarian comparative perspective.

Among these three categories, a gap is apparent in historical-structural comparative approaches that link the symbolic systems and agrarian rites of the Adyghe with the fertility traditions of ancient Anatolian civilisations. Previous studies have not sufficiently addressed the question of possible symbolic and cosmological continuities between these two cultural areas. Hence, this research is required to fill that gap through a cross-cultural approach integrating mythological, linguistic, and archaeological data within a comparative religious framework.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the parallels and potential continuities between Adyghe agricultural and fertility cults and the religious rites of the Hatti/Hittite peoples of Anatolia. By utilising translated Hittite primary sources—such as texts concerning the agricultural deity Telepinu and the storm god Teshub (Casa, 2010; Telepinus, 2024)—and incorporating archaeological findings and historical narratives, the research will examine ritual structures, divine figures, and symbolic frameworks within both belief systems. This investigation also draws on myths from Ugarit and Mesopotamia as comparative references, given the similar veneration patterns of storm and fertility deities across these regions (Schwemer, 2022; Vita, 2009).

From the researcher's perspective, the recurring symbolic and ritual patterns found in Adyghe agricultural and fertility cults—such as storm-god combat myths, sacred tree symbolism, and spring renewal rites—closely resemble those in the ancient Hatti–Hittite tradition. These resemblances appear too systematic to be explained by coincidence alone. In comparative religion, such structural and functional similarities are often interpreted as evidence of either cultural diffusion or the persistence of shared archetypes within a common religious substratum. As Wach observes, “the forms of this expression, though conditioned by the environment within which [they] originated, show similarities in structure; there are universal themes in religious thought; the universal is always embedded in the particular” (Wach, 1958, p. xxxix). Similarly, Eliade emphasises that “history cannot basically modify the structure of an archaic symbolism. History constantly adds new meanings, but they do not destroy the structure of the symbol” (M Eliade, 1987, p. 137), and that “it is through symbols that man... ‘opens himself’ to the general and the universal” (M Eliade, 1987, p. 211). Drawing on this theoretical framework, the present study argues that the parallels between Adyghe and Anatolian agricultural-fertility cults are manifestations of a broader transregional cultural and spiritual network, shaped by long-term processes of migration, intercultural contact, and cosmological continuity since the Bronze Age.

## 2. Method

This study investigates the historical and religious structures of agricultural and fertility cults among the Adyghe (Circassians) and their parallels with ancient Anatolian religious traditions, particularly those of the Hatti and Hittite civilisations. The unit of analysis consists of religious artefacts, ritual texts, mythological narratives, and ethnographic records that reflect ritual practices and symbolic cosmologies related to agricultural and fertility deities. The comparative scope also includes archaeological remains, such as burial customs and sacred symbols, which serve as material reflections of religious worldview.

This research adopts a qualitative historical-comparative design, aiming to explore patterns of religious continuity and transformation across time and space (Maxwell, 2008). This methodological choice is grounded in the need to reconstruct meanings embedded in mythological and ritual texts and to interpret the symbolic dimensions of religious practice in their socio-cultural contexts. The

comparative historical approach allows for tracing cultural and religious transmissions and the reinterpretation of ancient cultic structures across regional civilisations, particularly between the Western Caucasus and Anatolia. This design is considered appropriate due to the nature of the data, which is primarily textual, symbolic, and archaeological.

The primary sources of data include published and translated ancient Hittite and Anatolian religious texts (such as the *Telepinu Myth* and storm god hymns), Adyg oral myths documented in Russian and Caucasian ethnographies, and historical accounts from European and Russian travellers between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Secondary sources include academic analyses, archaeological reports, and comparative mythological studies (Woodard, 2019).

Data collection was conducted through textual and documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources. This included close reading of religious narratives, classification of divine figures and ritual structures, and examination of iconographic or symbolic elements in archaeological artefacts. The collection process followed a deductive framework, guided by the key concepts of agricultural cults, fertility rites, storm deities, and cosmological ordering. No fieldwork was conducted; rather, this study relies on synthesising previously documented materials across disciplines including history, anthropology, and religious studies (Casa, 2021).

The collected data were analysed using thematic and structural content analysis, focusing on recurring ritual patterns, theological symbolism, and the roles of divine beings across different temporal and geographical settings. The analysis proceeded in three steps: (1) identifying key ritual and mythological elements in each tradition; (2) mapping similarities and divergences between Adyg and Anatolian systems; and (3) interpreting the findings within a framework of religious transformation and cultural diffusion. This interpretative approach aims to elucidate both the shared spiritual substrata and the specific historical adaptations of agricultural-fertility cults in the regions under study.

### 3. Results

#### *Shibla Cults and Ancient Air Burial Practices*

This research reveals historical and archaeological traces of aerial burial practices and the veneration of the thunder god Shible among the Adyghe people. One of the earliest recorded sources comes from J. Schiltberger in 1427, who reported that the Circassians buried those struck by lightning—regarded as sacred beings—in coffins hung from tall trees. These burials were accompanied by three-day ceremonies involving animal sacrifices and ritual dances. Similar customs had been documented even earlier among the Kolkh people of the southwestern Caucasus, as recorded by Nymphodorus of Syracuse and Apollonius of Rhodes in the 3rd century BCE, as well as by Nicholas of Damascus in the 1st century BCE. These sources noted that the Kolkh considered cremation or in-ground burial to be desecration; instead, they wrapped the deceased in *untanned ox hide* and suspended them from trees far from settlements.

Archaeological evidence of the continuity of such practices was found by V.I. Sizov in the 1880s during excavations along the Black Sea coast, where he discovered stone chests beneath burial mounds used for mass interments. Sizov interpreted these findings as a cultural continuation of aerial burial traditions, noting that even in the 19th century, the Natukhai community in *stanitsa* (village) Raevskaya continued to practise such rites for lightning victims (Asfar & Maryet, 2024). G.Y. Sitnyansky later contextualised these customs within the broader ethnolinguistic framework of the Macro-Sino-Caucasian group, whose geographical spread ranged from the Pyrenees and the Caucasus to the Tien Shan, northern China, Siberia, and the Atlantic coasts of North America (Kagazezhev, 2024).

Further ritual details associated with Shible are recorded in the works of Shortanov, Tavernier, Bell, and Qantaria, describing seasonal ceremonies, including sacred dances, animal sacrifices, the veneration of lightning-struck oak trees, and drought-time rain-invoking processions. For instance, the ritual *Shible uj* (Shible's sacred dance) and the prayer *Thieleiu* (ritual invocation) were performed at the sound of the first thunder in spring (Collins, 2013). During prolonged droughts, a *myvekhe* or *myzhuekh*

(stone tomb of a lightning victim) served as the ritual centre, where barefoot male villagers performed a counter-clockwise rain dance. Collectively, this body of evidence illustrates a long-standing and complex religious tradition wherein aerial burial and nature-centred symbolism were deeply entwined with beliefs in fertility, sanctity, and the power of natural forces in Adyghe culture.

Table 1. Timeline of Historical and Archaeological Sources on Shibla Cult and Aerial Burial Practices

Period	Source	Region / Origin	Key Content
3rd c. BCE	Apollonius of Rhodes	Ancient Greece / Kolkh region	Kolkh people rejected burial/cremation; bodies hung in trees with ox hide.
Late 4th – Early 3rd c. BCE	Nymphodorus of Syracuse	Ancient Greece / Kolkh region	Similar aerial burial rituals; dead hung in trees, far from settlements.
1st c. BCE	Nicholas of Damascus	Roman Syria / Kolkh region	Confirms aerial burial custom among Kolkhi; non-burial of the dead.
1427 CE	J. Schiltberger	Circassia / Central Europe	Circassians hung lightning victims in trees, celebrated them with rituals.
17th c. CE	J.B. Tavernier	Western Europe / Circassia	Describes worship of Shibla; lightning-struck beings and objects seen as sacred.
19th c. CE	Raevskaya <i>stanitsa</i> village chief	Natukhai / Circassia	Testifies that aerial burial of lightning victims continued in the 1800s.
1880s	V.I. Sizov	Russian archaeologist / Black Sea coast	Found dolmen and stone chests; links findings to aerial burial tradition.
2001	G.Y. Sitnyansky	Russia / Caucasus studies	Connects aerial burial to Macro-Sino-Caucasian ethno-linguistic patterns.
2016	Shortanov	Adyghe / Caucasus	Details rituals of Shibla: sacred dance, thunder worship, seasonal ceremonies.
Undated (Modern)	Bell & Qantaria (via ABKEA citation)	Circassia / Adyghe sources	Describes animal sacrifice, rain ritual, symbolic use of lightning-struck trees.

The data shows that the Adyghe people have a long-standing tradition that combines belief in the lightning god Shible with an unusual method of burial. People who died from lightning strikes were considered sacred and were not buried in the usual way, but rather hung from trees. This act became part of broader religious rituals, such as dances, animal sacrifices, and special ceremonies to invoke rainfall. These practices reflect a strong belief in the power of nature and the vital role of Shible in ensuring the land's fertility and balance.

From the collected data, several key patterns emerge in the religious traditions of the Adyghe people. Firstly, the practice of aerial burial is not simply an alternative method of interment, but rather reflects a deeply held belief that individuals struck by lightning are sacred and must be treated with reverence. Their bodies were not buried in the ground but suspended from trees or placed in stone chests, signifying ritual honour for what was perceived as divine intervention. Secondly, this custom exhibits remarkable continuity across time and sources. From ancient Greek texts to 19th-century ethnographic observations, the persistence of these rituals indicates a deeply rooted cultural tradition

passed down through generations. Thirdly, Shible, the thunder god, is portrayed as a sacred embodiment of natural forces. The first clap of thunder, lightning-struck oaks, and the victims of lightning serve as triggers for religious rites and seasonal celebrations. Finally, these practices are closely connected to agrarian life. Rain-invoking ceremonies, animal sacrifices, and ritual dances reflect the community's dependence on agricultural cycles and their hopes for fertility and abundance. The veneration of Shible, therefore, plays a central role in maintaining harmony between human life, nature, and the divine.

These findings suggest that aerial burial and the veneration of Shible are not merely religious traditions, but part of a broader and more sophisticated belief system in Adyghe society. The strong connection between these rituals and natural phenomena—such as lightning, rain, and soil fertility—demonstrates a cosmological worldview in which nature is considered sacred and intimately bound to the spiritual domain. As such, these practices function not only as funeral rites or acts of reverence for the deceased, but also as symbolic mechanisms for sustaining ecological and social equilibrium. This data enriches our understanding of how local religions structure the relationship between humans, nature, and the sacred, while also highlighting the resilience of such traditions in the face of Islamisation. More broadly, this study contributes significantly to research on indigenous religions, syncretic dynamics, and evolving forms of *ecospirituality* (spirituality rooted in ecological awareness) within traditional Caucasian societies (Gilan, 2022).

#### *Agricultural and Fertility Cults in Ancient Anatolia*

This research identifies strong similarities between the springtime fertility rituals of the Adyghe people and the *Puruli* (also written *Vurrullia* or *Ezen Puruliyas*) spring festival of the ancient Hattian and Hittite civilisations in Anatolia (Shelestin, 2024). Both traditions revolve around agricultural renewal and are dedicated to a maternal earth deity. In the Hattian tradition, *Puruli* marked the New Year and the symbolic beginning of the planting season, and it was later integrated into Hittite royal liturgy. Likewise, the Adyghe people celebrate their New Year on 21 March, aligning with other agrarian cultures of the Near East, possibly indicating early ethnogenetic links between the Adyghe and ancient Anatolian civilisations.

According to mythological texts, the *Puruli* festival included a ritual re-enactment of the storm god Teshub's battle with the dragon Illuyanka, orchestrated by the goddess Inara. This myth was centred in the city of *Kiskilussa*, near the sea. Several sacred sites were involved, including *Tsaliyanu* mountain and the temple of the goddess *Tsashapuna*, revered for sending rain down to *Nerik*. The storm gods of *Nerik*, *Hattusa*, and *Tsippalanda*—including *Liliani* and *Telepinu*—were honoured during this festival (Ardzinba, 1982). The priests, known as *gudu* (anointed ones), were tasked with drawing lots of fate. Interestingly, the modern Adyghe language retains a related term, *ud* (seer or shaman), found in the *Nart* sagas to refer to shamans or prophetic figures.

The festival also celebrated *Teteshapi*, a goddess associated with animals, and included ancestral rituals led by the king at tombs in *Hattusa*. The festival was held across multiple sites, such as *Arinna*, *Nerik*, *Utruna*, and *Hakmis*. The Hittite reconquest of *Nerik* under Hattusili III—who named his son "Nerikkaili"—possibly followed an Adyghe linguistic pattern, adding the suffix *-ko* or *-ka* (meaning "son of") to denote kinship or origin.

Table 2. Comparison between Adyghe Spring Rituals and Hittite *Puruli* Festival

Element	Adyghe Tradition	Hittite/Hattian Tradition
New Year Date	21 March (Spring Equinox)	Early Spring, tied to agricultural cycle
Deity Worshipped	Shible (Thunder God), fertility spirits	Teshub (Storm God), Hannahanna (Earth Goddess)
Core Ritual	Rain invocation, dance, sacrifice, ancestor rites	Re-enactment of Illuyanka myth, temple rituals, sacrifices
Sacred Figures	<i>Ud</i> (shamans/seers) in <i>Nart</i> sagas	<i>Gudu</i> (anointed priests)

Cultural Role	Agrarian fertility, ecological renewal	State and royal blessing, mythic-political symbolism
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To put it simply, the spring rituals of the Adyghe people are very similar to the *Puruli* festival once held by ancient Hattian and Hittite societies in Anatolia. Both traditions involve welcoming the new farming season, giving thanks to gods of the earth and weather, and performing ceremonies based on old myths. These similarities suggest that there may be an ancient connection between the religious practices of the Adyghe people and those of the early Anatolian civilisations .

A close reading of the data reveals several striking patterns that suggest deep cultural and religious parallels between the Adyghe and ancient Anatolian civilisations. One prominent pattern is the use of a shared agrarian calendar and symbolism. Both the Adyghe and the Hattian–Hittite peoples marked the beginning of the New Year in early spring, a period associated with planting and agricultural renewal. This timing reflects a common understanding of seasonal cycles as sacred and pivotal to community well-being.

Another recurring theme is the central role of a storm deity—Shible among the Adyghe and Teshub among the Hittites—in religious mythology and ritual. In both traditions, the storm god is portrayed as a powerful cosmic force who restores order by defeating chaos, often represented by a mythical creature like the dragon Illuyanka. These mythic combats are not only symbolic but also re-enacted in festivals, reinforcing the community’s connection to the divine and to natural cycles.

The data also highlight intriguing priestly and linguistic parallels. In Hittite rituals, the *gudu* (anointed priests) conducted ceremonies and drew lots of fate, a function mirrored in the Adyghe figure of the *ud*, a seer or spiritual figure in the *Nart* epics. This linguistic resemblance suggests possible cultural continuity or at least shared religious archetypes.

Finally, both traditions exhibit a strong link between religious ritual and political authority. In Hittite society, kings led ancestral rites and were central to festivals such as *Puruli*, while among the Adyghe, family elders conducted important seasonal rituals. This integration of territorial sacrality and leadership is further illustrated by Hattusili III naming his son “Nerikkaili” after the city of *Nerik*, reinforcing the sacred bond between royal lineage and ancestral land. These patterns together point to a coherent ritual structure grounded in agrarian cosmology, divine kingship, and ancestral reverence.

These findings imply that the Adyghe people’s agricultural and religious traditions are not isolated but may be part of a larger web of ancient cultural connections that extend across the Near East. The strong similarities in ritual structure, symbolism, and timing between Adyghe spring ceremonies and the *Puruli* festival of ancient Anatolia suggest that both groups may have shared a common cosmological understanding of nature, time, and divine power. The linguistic resemblance between the Hittite priestly term *gudu* and the Adyghe *ud*, as well as the shared emphasis on storm deities and seasonal renewal, strengthen the argument for historical or cultural transmission. These data contribute valuable insight into how local spiritual practices—especially those tied to the land and seasonal cycles—can preserve elements of much older religious systems. This helps expand our knowledge of Eurasian religious continuity and highlights the importance of ecospirituality and agrarian ritual in maintaining long-term cultural identity across regions and civilisations.

*Shible and Thagaledj in Comparative Perspective: Parallels with Teshub and Telepinu*

The study identifies compelling mythological and ritual parallels between the Adyghe religious figures *Shible* (Adyghe: *Shchyble*) and *Thagaledj* (Adyghe: *Thyegyelage*) and the Hittite deities Teshub and Telepinu. In Adyghe mythology, *Shible* is a thunder god who battles giant underground dragons known as *blagoj* (Adyghe: underground serpentine creatures) that block water sources and bring drought. These creatures are driven away by *Shible*’s thunderbolts in narratives that resemble mythic combat (Sazonov, 2011). Similarly, Teshub, the Hittite storm god, defeats the dragon Illuyanka in a foundational myth celebrated during the *Puruli* festival (Liana, 2023). The linguistic and functional similarities between the names “Teshub” and “*Shible*” —both rooted in syllables connoting “strike from above” —suggest shared etymological or symbolic origins.

A comparable correspondence is found between the Adyghe agricultural deity *Thagaledj* and the Hittite vegetation god Telepinu. *Thagaledj* is described as a white-bearded elder who gifts millet seeds to the *Narts* (mythical Adyghe ancestral heroes) and presides over agricultural rites and fertility. His sacred apple tree, bearing dual-coloured fruit, symbolises sexual reproduction and cosmological balance. Likewise, Telepinu is a disappearing-and-returning god of fertility and vegetation, whose sacred tree, *eia*, contains animal fat, grain spirits, and symbols of life and continuity. The use of sheep or goat skins in both Adyghe and Hittite fertility rites—including hanging them on trees or *tau*-shaped crosses—further reinforces these parallels (Elian, 2024).

Table 3. Comparative Attributes of Adyghe and Hittite Deities

Attribute	Adyghe Mythology	Hittite Mythology
<b>Thunder God</b>	<i>Shible</i> : defeats dragons blocking rivers	Teshub: defeats dragon Illuyanka
<b>Agricultural/Fertility Deity</b>	<i>Thagaledj</i> : white-bearded elder, seed giver	Telepinu: disappearing god of crops and rebirth
<b>Sacred Tree Symbolism</b>	Dual-fruit apple tree (birth of male/female)	<i>Eia</i> tree: contains spirits of fertility and longevity
<b>Ritual Animal Skin Use</b>	Goat/sheep skin hung during drought rituals	Sheep skin on evergreen trees in spring festivals
<b>Mythological Motif</b>	Restoring cosmic balance through divine conflict	Similar themes of loss–return and renewal

Simply put, Adyghe myths about *Shible* and *Thagaledj* bear a strong resemblance to Hittite stories about Teshub and Telepinu. Both *Shible* and Teshub are storm gods who defeat chaos-bringing dragons. *Thagaledj* and Telepinu are fertility deities associated with crops, sacred trees, and rituals involving animal skins. These parallels suggest that the Adyghe religion shares deep mythological themes with ancient Anatolian belief systems.

The comparison between Adyghe and Hittite mythology reveals several recurring patterns that point to shared religious themes and symbolic structures. One of the most prominent similarities is the heroic role of storm gods in both traditions. *Shible*, in Adyghe belief, and Teshub, in Hittite mythology, are powerful thunder deities who restore balance to the world by defeating dragon-like beings that obstruct the life-giving flow of water. This shared motif highlights thunder as a divine protector and agent of cosmic order—especially significant in agrarian societies reliant on rainfall for survival.

Another striking parallel lies in the symbolism of sacred trees. In Adyghe narratives, the tree created by *Thagaledj* bears fruit in two colours, each symbolising a different gender and spiritual principle. In Hittite belief, Telepinu’s *eia* tree holds symbolic elements of fertility, growth, and continuity. In both traditions, trees serve as powerful icons of reproduction, divine blessing, and cosmic renewal.

A further shared aspect is the ritual use of animal skins, particularly those of goats and sheep. Among both the Adyghe and the Hittites, these skins are hung on sacred trees or wooden poles during spring fertility rituals. This ritual practice suggests a common symbolic vocabulary rooted in seasonal cycles, animal sacrifice, and the perceived link between nature, fertility, and divine favour.

Moreover, linguistic and theological correspondences reinforce these mythic and ritual connections. The phonological similarities between “*Shible*” and “*Teshub*”, both implying “he who strikes from above”, combined with the parallel roles of religious intermediaries—the *ud* (Adyghe seer) and *gudu* (Hittite priest)—point to potential shared ritual prototypes or linguistic ancestry.

These findings support the hypothesis that Adyghe religious mythology is embedded within a broader matrix of ancient Eurasian symbolic systems. The thematic and ritual alignment with Hittite traditions—particularly concerning mythic combat, agrarian renewal, and cosmic symbolism—suggests either prolonged cultural transmission or common prehistoric origins. Such parallels expand our understanding of how highland and plateau communities in the Caucasus and Anatolia preserved



intricate theological worldviews rooted in the harmony between nature, fertility, and divine authority. This comparative evidence contributes significantly to current research on transregional continuity in ancient *ecospiritual* (environmentally-rooted spiritual) traditions and positions the Adyghe pantheon as a living vestige of Bronze Age religious structures.

#### 4. Discussion

This study reveals the historical and mythological connections between the agricultural and fertility cults of the Adyghe people and the religious practices of the ancient Anatolian civilisations, particularly the Hatti and Hittites. Three major findings emerge: (1) the existence of the *Shible* cult and aerial burial practices as part of Adyghe cosmology; (2) structural similarities between Adyghe spring rituals and the Hittite *Puruli* festival, including shared dates, ritual forms, and divine figures; and (3) narrative and symbolic parallels between Adyghe deities *Shible* and *Thagaledj* and the Anatolian gods *Teshub* and *Telepinu*, particularly in the use of lightning motifs, sacred trees, and animal skins. Together, these elements suggest the possibility of long-term cultural transmission or a shared religious substratum within ancient Eurasian systems.

These similarities can be explained through long historical processes involving migration, cultural diffusion, and the enduring continuity of symbolic systems across regions. The Adyghe homeland, located in the north-western Caucasus, functioned for millennia as a transitional corridor between Eurasia and Anatolia, facilitating the transmission of mythic motifs, ritual forms, and cosmological concepts since at least the Bronze Age. This geographic position provided sustained opportunities for intercultural contact through trade, seasonal migration, and intermarriage, allowing religious ideas to circulate alongside material goods. Such patterns embody what Wach describes as the universality of religious themes, in which “*the forms of this expression, though conditioned by the environment within which [they] originated, show similarities in structure; the universal is always embedded in the particular*” (Wach, 1958, p. 20). In the Adyghe and Anatolian contexts, this universality is evident in the structural recurrence of spring renewal rites, storm-god combat myths, and fertility-god disappearance–return cycles, each adapted to local landscapes, deities, and agricultural calendars.

In line with Eliade’s assertion that “*history cannot basically modify the structure of an archaic symbolism... they do not destroy the structure of the symbol*” (Mircea Eliade, 1959, p. 138), the persistence of these motifs suggests that their symbolic core transcends specific historical circumstances. The storm deity’s victory over a chaos monster—whether expressed in the Adyghe *Shible* confronting a subterranean serpent or in the Anatolian *Teshub* defeating the dragon *Illuyanka*—encodes a universal agrarian concern with restoring cosmic order before the planting season. Similarly, the disappearance and return of a fertility god, as in *Thagaledj* and *Telepinu*, encapsulates the cyclical death and regeneration of vegetation, a theme found in numerous agrarian mythologies worldwide. Such myths function as symbolic narratives that not only explain natural cycles but also integrate human ritual action into the cosmic order, ensuring agricultural fertility through ceremonial re-enactment. These enduring archetypal structures, while clothed in distinct cultural imagery, point to a shared substratum of religious thought that unites distant societies within a common symbolic and spiritual network.

This connection is further explained by the land-based and ancestral structure of both societies. In Adyghe and Hittite belief systems, agricultural rites involved the participation of ancestral figures, elders, or kings, reinforcing the religious-political function of maintaining cosmic harmony. This explains why ritual patterns and symbolic structures could be preserved across generations and even transregional boundaries.

This study extends previous research on Adyghe agricultural and fertility cults by offering a more structured comparative approach to the religious practices of ancient Anatolia, especially those of the Hatti and Hittites. Works by Ardzinba (1982) proposed potential mythological links between the Adyghe and Hittites, but their analyses remained general and lacked systematic narrative and structural comparison. Meanwhile, Shortanov (2016) documented Adyghe rituals—such as aerial burial and veneration of the thunder god *Shible*—without connecting them to the Anatolian religious system. This study differs by presenting a cross-temporal and cross-cultural synthesis that integrates

textual, symbolic, linguistic, and archaeological evidence, positioning Adyghe myths and rites within a broader Eurasian religious landscape.

The main *novelty* of this study lies in its identification of symbolic and functional parallels between Adyghe deities—such as *Shible* and *Thagaledj*—and Hittite figures like *Teshub* and *Telepinu*, as well as structural similarities between Adyghe spring rituals and the Anatolian *Puruli* festival. It also highlights a possible shared religious archetype through linguistic correspondences, such as between *ud* (Adyghe: seer or diviner) and *gudu* (Hittite: anointed priest), and shows how agrarian and cosmological rites played a central role in sustaining natural and social order in both traditions. By comparing two distinct religious systems with remarkably similar structures, this study contributes to broader discourses on symbolic continuity in Eurasian religious history and opens new directions for the study of local spirituality rooted in ecology and agriculture (Shaov, Khunagov, Lyausheva, & Nekhai, 2016).

From a historical perspective, the connection between Adyghe religious practices and those of ancient Anatolia points to the potential existence of shared mythological archetypes passed down through cultural exchanges in ancient Eurasia. Migration patterns, trade routes, and sociopolitical interactions, especially in transitional regions like the Caucasus, played a pivotal role in facilitating the diffusion of cosmologies and deities. Studies have shown that the spread of agro-pastoralism in Eurasia involved both migration and cultural diffusion, with mythological motifs being distributed across vast regions through population movements and trade (Y. E. Berezkin, 2018; Lemmen, 2015). The cosmological motif of a storm deity defeating chaos, often depicted as a dragon or subterranean creature, is found across Eurasia and connects mythological traditions from the Near East to Europe (Kitts, 2013). The presence of these motifs in both Adyghe and Anatolian cultures highlights the deep intercultural connections and shared mythological frameworks that transcended geographical boundaries, suggesting a common religious substratum that evolved through historical processes of migration and cultural diffusion (Y. Berezkin, 2016).

The development of these practices over time in both cultures reflects the resilience of agrarian ideologies, which functioned to regulate social life and spiritual beliefs. On a **social** level, the preservation of these rituals, even in the face of cultural and religious shifts, underscores their fundamental role in maintaining social cohesion. In agrarian societies, religion was deeply embedded in daily life and agricultural activities, and participation in collective rituals played a crucial role in fostering group identification and social unity (Power, 2018; Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014). Both Adyghe and Hittite societies utilized their religious systems to regulate agricultural activities, seasonal cycles, and social hierarchies. The involvement of ancestral figures, kings, and elders in these rituals not only reinforced the religious framework but also affirmed the political and social structures that upheld order in their communities. As highlighted by the study of the She organization in rural China, such rituals promote trust and social cohesion among different social groups (Zhou & Wang, 2024). Therefore, religious practices in both cultures were not merely metaphysical but were deeply interwoven with social and political governance, ensuring the stability and continuity of agrarian societies (Lohse, 2007).

Ideologically, these rituals reflect a shared understanding of cosmic order. The central role of deities like *Thagaledj*, *Teshub*, and *Telepinu*, who control natural forces such as weather and fertility, embodies a worldview in which human society is inseparable from the environment. The cyclical nature of the seasons and the belief in divine intervention in agricultural prosperity provide a theological foundation for maintaining both ecological and social balance. Studies have shown that in ancient agrarian societies, cosmology and religion were intrinsically linked, with cosmological beliefs shaping ethical and religious practices (Fitzgerald, 2020; Pennington & McDonough, 2008). In the Adyghe and Hittite societies, the influence of these deities was considered essential for sustaining life, reinforcing ideological commitments to agricultural management and ecological harmony. This reflects a broader pattern found in ancient cultures where divine intervention in weather patterns, such as rain and drought, was crucial for agriculture (Botica, 2013; Larmer, 2015). Furthermore, the participation of ancestral figures, kings, and elders in these rituals underscores their role in upholding not just religious frameworks but also social and political structures, ensuring the stability of agrarian societies

(McHugh, 2019). These rituals served to integrate religion into the daily lives of both elites and commoners, fostering social cohesion and legitimizing the social hierarchy through shared labor and spiritual engagement (Lohse, 2007; Torres, 2017).

Functionally, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how agrarian and cosmological rituals play a central role in both societies. It highlights how these rituals not only sustain the physical order of agriculture but also the social order of the community, binding together spiritual, political, and environmental aspects. Through a comparative analysis, this study sheds light on how these religious practices formed the cultural foundation that transcended regional boundaries, enabling these societies to maintain their cohesion across generations.

However, there are potential dysfunctions in this research. One limitation is the challenge in fully reconciling differences in ritual practices due to the distinct contexts in which these religious systems developed. While the similarities are striking, it is important to acknowledge that some of these practices may have evolved as responses to local needs or environmental factors that are not directly visible through the available evidence. The assumption of a shared religious substratum could oversimplify the complexity of these cultural interactions and risks imposing modern interpretations on ancient belief systems. Additionally, the continual reliance on archaeological and mythological texts risks overlooking the unseen aspects of these rituals, such as oral traditions and the lived experiences of practitioners (Moser & Knust, 2017). This study also faces the challenge of overgeneralization, trying to link distant cultures based solely on ritual similarities. Although the shared motifs are compelling, they may not fully represent the complexity of the religious, political, and social functions these rituals served in each society. For example, rituals in agrarian societies, such as those in Minoan culture, often integrated religious practices into daily life and social structures, which might not be adequately reflected through a purely comparative framework (Younger & Rehak, 2008). Therefore, a more nuanced approach, considering regional uniqueness and indigenous practices, is necessary to avoid excessive generalization at the level of cultural diffusion (Laneri, 2011).

Based on the findings of this study, several policy actions need to be taken to address the potential dysfunctions related to overgeneralization and reliance on archaeological and mythological evidence. First, policies that encourage a multidisciplinary approach in the study of ancient religions are essential, involving experts from anthropology, sociology, and ethnography to better understand the social and cultural contexts that shape these rituals. Furthermore, to reduce the risk of overgeneralization, it is important to design a locally-based approach that values the uniqueness of ritual practices in each region, considers regional variations in rituals and beliefs, and takes into account local factors influencing the evolution of these rituals. Such policies should support more in-depth field research, especially that which involves oral traditions and the direct experiences of practitioners, in order to gain a more holistic and authentic understanding. By involving local communities in the research process and giving them the space to share their knowledge and experiences, we can gain richer and more accurate insights into how these rituals developed and functioned within broader social contexts (Ashkhotov, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the agricultural and fertility cults of the Adyghe people exhibit significant structural, symbolic, and mythological connections with the religious practices of the ancient Anatolian civilisations, particularly the Hatti and Hittites. Three main findings support this argument: the existence of the *Shible* (thunder deity) cult intertwined with aerial burial practices; the structural parallels between Adyghe springtime rites and the Hittite *Puruli* (New Year and agricultural renewal) festival; and the narrative and symbolic similarities between Adyghe deities *Shible* and *Thagaledj* (agricultural elder deity) and Anatolian gods *Teshub* and *Telepinu*, including the use of lightning symbolism, sacred trees, and animal skins in rituals. These findings suggest that the Adyghe belief system is not an isolated development but rather part of a wider Eurasian spiritual matrix formed through migration, cultural diffusion, and long-term cosmological continuity since the Bronze Age.

Scientifically, this research offers a novel contribution to the study of ancient religions and indigenous spiritualities by presenting a comparative, cross-temporal, and cross-cultural framework that synthesises mythological, linguistic, archaeological, and ritual data. It introduces the possibility of shared religious archetypes between the Adyghe and Anatolian peoples and affirms the relevance of *ecospirituality*—a spiritually rooted ecological ethic—as a foundational value in agrarian societies. In doing so, this study deepens our understanding of how natural symbolism, seasonal rites, and cosmological narratives have shaped spiritual identity and cultural resilience within local communities.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on written sources and the absence of direct fieldwork or ethnographic interviews with contemporary Adyghe communities. In addition, constraints in accessing original Anatolian texts and potential interpretative biases in translated materials present methodological challenges. Future research is encouraged to explore the performative and contemporary dimensions of Adyghe ritual life, including the potential revitalisation of *ecospiritual* values in modern contexts. Comparative studies with other agrarian cultures of the Caucasus or West Asia may also help to verify the broader continuity of symbolic patterns across regions and historical periods.

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