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Genus and Sexus in Hittite

In this era of “political correctness,” when “gender studies” aspire to academic respectability and militant feminists want to rewrite history as “her-story,” language itself, or at least American English, has proved to be remarkably recalcitrant to gender-neutral retooling. Try as you will, he is he and she is she, so that comprehensive pronominal reference has to resort to he/she or written (s)he. The situation is even worse in other gender-saturated Indo-European languages, whether German or French with their definite articles and adjectival endings, or Russian with its three genders where the participle-based past tenses have even infiltrated the finite verb system (*šjol* ‘he went’ : *šla* ‘she went’). Such is the situation also in Semitic, which has verbal as well as nominal grammatical feminine forms. Even the autochthonous Hattic language of Anatolia gives evidence of masculine vs. feminine gender, of an opposition of ‘him’ (*ta-*) and ‘her’ (*se-*).

The Hittite lack of a grammatical feminine rates as a surprise. Whereas the basic opposition animate : neuter is fundamental to Indo-European (and may ultimately reflect an ergative : intransitive opposition), the feminine is clearly a secondary outgrowth of the animate gender, a matter of derivation rather than primordial formal opposition. As such it could prosper to a point, as in Greek and Latin (which still have some adjectives without feminine forms), or go overboard (as in Slavic), or recede to pronominal debris (as in English). The Germanic languages in particular have had a hard time deciding whether the word for ‘man’ itself should be masculine (German

mensch) or neuter (Danish *menneske*) or feminine (Swedish *människa*), but in Modern Scandinavian generally the grammatical feminine has been greatly curtailed, almost as in English. The Romance languages, on the other hand, have embraced the feminine to the extent of losing the neuter, leading to a binary masculine : feminine opposition with potential enhanced sexist overtones (“chercher la femme” in French means not ‘look for the woman,’ but rather ‘look for woman as the key to the plot,’ i.e. ‘keep an eye on the sex angle’; Latin collective neuters like *folia* have become feminines: French *feuille*, Spanish *hoja*, and abstractions generally are feminine, with the result that Liberty with her torch is a Miss, as is e.g. Justice with her blindfold and scales, or Marianne as the pretty face of France itself).

What then has Hittite done? Those misguided scholars who think that Hittite is somehow para-Indo-European, with Anatolian being collateral to Proto-Indo-European itself, i.e. the Indo-Hittitologists, would (and do) claim that the lack of feminine is simply an Indo-Hittite archaism. The other view, which I advocate, is that the evolving grammatical feminine, of which there are embryonic residual intimations, was nipped in the bud in the Anatolian branch of Indo-European. Why this happened is speculative and inferential; it was certainly not due to Hattic or Akkadian and must antedate the Anatolian locale. One influence which cannot be ruled out is Fenno-Ugric, not at all in the sense of Collinder’s Indo-Uralic, but as a specific symbiotic or contactual impact at some point of prehistory; there are other

such similarities, e.g. the comparison of the Hittite prohibitive **le dā* 'take not' with Finnish *älä tuo*.

However that might be, and it is certainly far fetched, reading a Hittite text suffers under the same handicap as starting a Finnish or Estonian novel: you may not know for pages whether the protagonists are men or women, until some chance reveals it, maybe a personal name. In the Hittite instance it is accompanied by the sumerographic classifier for 'woman' SAL (or new-fangled MUNUS). Thus a sex-marker of the script adds information to the noncommittal grammar. The Hittite scribes were quite insensitive to the feminine forms of Akkadian grammar (as their frequent akkadographic misuse of masculine forms referring to females amply attests); but this is no stranger than hearing my Finnish friends refer to women as 'he' when speaking English.

This quirkiness of *genus* in Finnish and Estonian does not seem to affect to any measurable extent actual gender attitudes or sexual mores of the speakers in question, and it is not likely that the same feature in ancient Anatolia had any more impact in that remote past either. Having thus disposed expeditiously of the matter of *genus* in Hittite, let us go on to the much less abstruse and certainly more entertaining topic of *sexus*. "Sex in Hittite" would as a title certainly have wider sales appeal, but scholarly *gravitas* contraindicates according it masthead billing.

Nor is there truly that much to report about sex in the strict, descriptive, clinical sense. Had Mika Waltari written a Hittite pendant to *Sinuhe* and *The Etruscan*, he would have had to spice it up from his own imagination. There is a diverse vocabulary for the sex acts of both men and animals (*kattan ses-* 'sleep with, cohabit with,' *ark-* 'mount, copulate with,' *iskisa pai-* 'go to the back' [obviously *venus reversa*], *saliga-* 'have intercourse with' [curiously evo-

cative of Swedish *samlag*], *wen-* 'fuck, rape'); but there are few explicit descriptions. The most graphic may be the poetic Hurrian-based siring of the rock-monster Ullikummi by the god Kumarbi on a gigantic, apparently female monolith near the city of Urkiš (which is presently being excavated by my UCLA colleague Giorgio Buccellati at Tell Mozan on the Syrian-Turkish frontier):

What she has below, on this his mind leaped forth (*istanza parā watkut*, standard phrase for sexual arousal), he cohabited with the rock (*peruni kattan sesta*), into her his maleness (*pisnatar*) [verb lost], five times he took her, again ten times he took her.

It would be rash to render *kattan sesta* as "he slept with the rock" and to make conclusions about the coital posture involved. It may be a vague euphemism, even as the poet of the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite uses the verb κοιμᾶσθαι 'sleep with' about the pairings of the goddess's animal retinue. More probably the Hittites, like the Greeks (and their gods), preferentially coupled *more ferarum*.

When in due time Kumarbi's rock baby is brought to birth by midwives, attended by fate-goddesses and maieutic deities, there follow birth rituals which have areal analogues but also recall ancient Roman practices: the newborn is set upon the father's knee (*ginuwas halai-* like Latin *in genua tollere*) in order to be legitimized (Lat. *genuinus*) and given its proper name (*sanezzi laman dai-*, like Latin *nōmen proprium indere* or Sanskrit *priyām nāma dhā-*). Thus a partiarchal order obtains, of which there are many other indications. There is an ideal balancing of sex roles in prayers such as the following:

LÚ-ni LÚ-natar tarhuilatar
SAL-ni SAL-natar annitalwatar

to the man virility and potency,
to the woman femininity and motherhood

The rigidity of this clear-cut duality was a recipe for low tolerance of male deviation on the one hand, and for keeping woman in her place on the other. When swearing in military recruits, these were threatened with dire sanctions in case of dereliction, including having their arrows broken, being outfitted with distaff and spindle and dressed up as women. Cowards and effeminate were despised but may have been at least theoretically redeemable by feats of hunting, even as in some ancient Germanic societies (according to Ammianus Marcellinus) they were given a chance to kill boars and bears rather than being cruelly drowned in bogs (as were Tacitus' *imbelles et corpore infames*).

The inequality of the sexes, which must have started in the cradle, certainly lasted to the grave. Even in the funerary rites, in the gathering of bones upon cremation, those of a man were placed on a chair, while a woman's rested on a *hallsalli*, a stool. This lesser piece of furniture, also spelled *hassalli*, was in origin probably **hams-alli*, i.e. a birthing stool similar to the obstetrical support contraption called *harnau*. It was quintessentially a woman's seat, in life and death. The only attested male to be offered a *hassalli* to sit on is Kumarbi (*KUB* 33 102 I 22-23), and for a reason, for he was a male capable of pregnancy (the sire of Ullikummi had earlier bitten off his own sire's genitals and been impregnated thereby).

Other echoes of "woman's place" ring through the texts. Tilling was men's work, milling mainly women's. We read how "the lady of the house goes to the millhouse and grinds the mill" (*KBo* 15 35 + 33 I 10-11). Hattusilis I in his Annals describes how he incapacitated a workforce: "the slave-women's hands from the mill I took, and the slaves' hands from the field labor I took"

(*KBo* 10 2 III 16-17). This agrees with the observation that Homeric Greek has only a feminine agent noun for the verb 'to grind,' namely ἄλετρις, and so does Mycenaean Greek, *me-re-ti-ri-ja*; the masculine form ἄλέτης exists but means 'millstone.'

One may wonder how this station of women squares with the important position and power of the Tawanannas, the semi-independent Hittite queen who was more than just the king's wife and held a lifetime position. I would say it fits quite well: dynastic doings at the top of a patriarchal society rarely percolate down to humble social structures. Catherine the Great may have called the shots for Counts Orlov and Potëmkin, but the average Russian *mužik* would go on beating his wife as usual.

Let us end with a more intimate glimpse of Hittite family life, this time in the Hurrian-based tale of a man named Appu, who lived in a kingdom by the sea, as the wealthiest cattle-baron around. Silver, gold, and gemstone he had aplenty, but no offspring. He saw the elders of his town feed their sons, but he had no one to give bread to. Some manner of religious ritual was set up to relieve the barrenness, but instead the touchy Appu got up and went home to bed, with his boots on. His wife asked the household: "He has never performed; will he perform now?" She then went to bed with Appu with her clothes on. Appu started from his sleep and the wife asked him: "Never did you perform; what about now?" Appu heard and retorted: "You are a woman like all women. You know nothing (*nu-wa natta kuitki sakti*)." With his bruised ego he jumped out of bed, took a white lamb and went to see the sun god as a sex therapist. The god looked down from heaven, metamorphosed into a young man, approached him, and offered to help. Hearing his story, his advice was: "Go, drink and get high! In bed the gods will give you a son." This gave Appu the impetus to try and the recipe

worked. The birth of a son is described much as Ullikummi's, but the offspring was fated to be maleficent and was given the name Bad. A second pregnancy produced another son who was named Righteous. But that is another story, of two contrary brothers, and Appu was just their old man.

One could continue with the sex practices and hangups of the Hittites, e.g. rituals to cure impotence, or how Suppiluliumas tells his Armenian vassal and son-in-law Hukkanas of Hayasa to keep his hands off his

wife's sisters and not even look at other women, on pain of death, grotesquely reinforcing the prohibition with anecdotal precedents. Or deal with the EZEN *hassumas* or 'Feast of Procreation,' where the adolescent Hittite prince is introduced to sex at banquet with a dozen prostitutes; this is a venerable practice which Turkish fathers continue to observe with their pubescent sons to this day. But even the subject of sex can get dreary and must sometime come to an end.