

# A Hittite Fertility Rite?

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The Hittite word *a-ra-ar-ki-iš-kán-zi* is a hapax legomenon occurring in a small ritual fragment KUB 11.25 iii 20. The preceding context, best read from a duplicate manuscript, deals with ritual manipulation of wool (KUB 11.20 i 5-21 = 11.25 iii 2-14; OH/NS):

GAL DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL <sup>SI</sup>G kunzan dāi ta GIŠ-i ḥamanki § ta GAL LÚ.MEŠ <sup>GI</sup>ŠBANŠUR  
<sup>GI</sup>ŠBANŠUR-az ganki § GAL <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>UŠ</sup>.BAR SÍG BABBAR SÍG SA<sub>5</sub> anda immiyazi ta  
*išḫuzzin* ANA GAL DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL pāi n=an=za=an=kan antaki=šši dāi (dupl.  
*antakitti*!) § GAL <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>UŠ</sup>.BAR=ašta parā [(p)]ēḫutezzi [(<sup>LÚ</sup>A)]LAN.ZU<sub>9</sub> aḫa ḫalzāi  
 [(GAL)].MEŠ DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL=kan [(GAL <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>SI</sup>)]PA anda [(uwad)]anzi karza dāi  
 [(t=ašta p)arā] pēdāi<sup>1</sup>

"The chief of palace officials takes a (wool) *kunzan* and ties it onto (a piece of) wood. The chief of the table-men hangs it from a table. The chief of weavers mingles white and red wool. He gives the belt to the chief of the palace officials, and he puts it on/in his *antaka*. One escorts out the chief of the weavers. The performer cries 'aha!'. The chief(s) of the palace officials escort(s) in the chief of shepherds. He takes the/a *karzan* and carries it out."

The above scene is immediately followed by that in which the action *ararkiškanzi* takes place (KUB 11.25 iii 15-30):

§ DUMU.É.GAL GAD-an dāi t=ašta pēdai § DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL <sup>GI</sup>ŠŠÚ.A BABBAR  
<sup>GI</sup>Šzahurtin BABBAR=y[a] danzi t=ašta pēdanzi § kuitman=ma LUGAL  
 MUNUS.LUGAL *ararkiškanzi* <sup>GI</sup>Š<sup>D</sup>INANNA.ḪI.A GAL=ma SÌR<sup>RU</sup> <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>pal</sup>watallēš  
*palwiškanz[i]* § mān zinnanzi <sup>GI</sup>Š<sup>D</sup>INANNA.ḪI.A karuššīyanuanzi n=aš EGIR-pa  
 pēdi=šši=pat tiyanz[i] § n=ašta <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>NAR</sup> <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>ALAN</sup>.ZU<sub>9</sub> <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>pal</sup>watallēš  
 DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>MEŠEDI</sup> parā pānzi [LU]GAL=ma É.ŠÀ-na paizzi § (traces of  
 one more line, then break)

"A palace official takes the cloth and carries it out. The palace officials take the white throne and the white z. and carry them out. While the king and queen *ararkiškanzi*, they play the large lyres. The clappers clap. When they are finished, they silence the lyres and put them back in their appointed place. The singers, performers, clappers, palace officials, and bodyguard go out, but the king goes into the inner chamber."

I know of only one previous interpretation of *ararkiškanzi*. Friedrich-Kammenhuber (1975-84: 250 f.) tries to take the word as an error for *ār(a)škanzi* 'they arrive' (iterative). This analysis must be rejected on all counts. First, the putative scribal error is highly implausible. As a visual error, the copyist had to have misread a sequence *a-ar-aš-* as *a-ra-ar-*. The

<sup>1</sup> KUB 11.25 has: GAL DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL=kan GAL <sup>LÚ</sup>.MEŠ<sup>S</sup>[IPA] anda uwatezzi.

signs AŠ and RA are nothing alike, to say nothing of the differing order. An error of audition is even less likely: trisyllabic /ars.skants.si/ would had to have been misheard as five-syllable /a.rar.kis.skants.si/. Furthermore, the conjunction *kuitman* requires that the -ške- form be taken as a progressive: "while the king and queen are arriving" makes no sense in the context. This would mean that as soon as the royal couple arrives on the scene with much fanfare, everyone leaves (including them)!

The issue is sealed by the fact that in a parallel passage we find simple *ar-ki-iš-kán-zi* in a directly comparable context (IBoT 2.96 v 5-20; OH/NS):

*nu PANI MUNUS.LUGAL 2 DUMU.É.GAL [katta?] paršnan ḫarkanzi [--] ta karza kattan ḫarkanzi § GAL LÚ.MEŠ.UŠ.BAR SÍG BABBAR taruppand[an] ANA GAL DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL pāi GAL DUMU.MEŠ.É.GAL 1-šu tarupzi t=an GAL DUMU.É.GAL LUGAL-i pāi LUGAL-uš 2-anki ta karzanaš nāi § LÚALAN.ZU, aḫā ḫalzāi [ʰ]ᵁpalwatallaš palwaizzi § [ ] arkiškanzi [ ] x-nan walḫannieškanzi [ʰ]ᵁALAN.ZU, aḫā ḫalzāi [ʰ]ᵁpalwatallaš p[alwaizzi] (breaks off)*

"Two palace officials are squatting before the queen. They are holding a *karzan* (from) below. The chief of the weavers gives twisted white wool to the chief of the palace officials. The chief of the palace officials twists it once. The chief of the palace officials gives it to the king. The king (twists it) twice and winds (it) around the *karzan*. The performer shouts 'aha!'; the clapper claps. [ ] *arkiškanzi*. They play a [ ]. The performer shouts 'aha!'; the clapper claps".

It cannot be coincidence that four of six instances of the very rare word *karzan-* occur in just the passages cited. The texts must be closely related. There is room to restore LUGAL MUNUS.LUGAL as the subject in IBoT 2.96 v 18, but I would not exclude another subject. The similar subject matter and ritual action do confirm that we must take *ararkiškanzi* in KUB 11.25 iii 20 at face value: it is the -ske- form of a reduplicated stem *arark-* to a base verb *ark-*.

There are two verbal stems *ark-* in Hittite. One is transitive, with a sense 'cut up', used always of animals or land. The second verb *ark-* is transitive or intransitive, meaning 'mount' (sexually) or 'copulate', used always of animals (Friedrich-Kammenhuber, 1975-84: 301 f. and Puhvel, 1984: 142 f.).<sup>2</sup> The first cannot be the base of our *arark-*, because even

<sup>2</sup> The verb also means 'climb', but in the very specific sense of 'climb by wrapping one's legs around' (of a bear climbing a tree in KUB 29.1 i 29-30 and of a man climbing a rope in KUB 55.28 iii 4&8). For the latter see Ünal 1988: 106. Contra Ünal and Collins 1989: 52 the example in KUB 29.1 has *both* a sexual and non-sexual meaning in the context. This is demanded by the presence of *kattan šeš-*, for which the meaning 'sleep with' (have sex) would have been unavoidable for any Hittite speaker/hearer beside 'sleep under'. See for all this Watkins 1975, who also shows that the non-sexual sense may easily be secondary: cf. Greek *orkhéomai* 'dance' or German *arg* 'wick-

if we assumed an unexpressed direct object pronoun, there is simply no suitable antecedent in the context. Note that all putative objects of 'cutting up' have explicitly been removed from the scene. The absence of any plausible direct object forces a reading of *ararkiškanzi* as belonging to *ark-* in its intransitive use 'copulate'. We must conclude that the Hittite royal couple performs ritual sex to the accompaniment of music and clapping.

Before I turn to further justification of this startling conclusion, let me respond to two potential objections. First, would the Hittites have permitted such a scene as part of a public, state ritual? I remind readers of the famous scene on the Inandik Vase, which includes, in addition to other elaborate ritual preparations and activities involving many participants, a couple on a bed with the man lifting the woman's veil, and immediately above them an undisguised scene of sexual intercourse. The interpretation of the entire scene remains under discussion. Özgüç (1988: esp. 100 f.), to whom I refer readers for further details, suggests that the scene depicts a *hieros gamos*. But we have no iconographic details to assure us that either figure on the bed is a deity, and the couple could just as easily be the king and queen. In any case, the elaborateness of the scene and number of participants argue that we are dealing with a public ritual. The explicit depiction of sexual intercourse shows that the Hittites were not squeamish about such an action in this context, if it were for some reason called for.

As to the use of the verb *ark-*, otherwise attested only of animals, but here putatively of the royal couple, the motivation for its use may have been precisely for its crudeness or shock value, in order to heighten the sexual *power/efficacy* of the act. One may compare the even more shocking language and activities of the Sanskrit *Aśvamedha* Sacrifice, whose function has been explicated by Jamison (1996: 65 ff.).<sup>3</sup>

We are still left to wonder as to the purpose of such an action by the royal couple and especially its relationship to the immediately preceding activities involving manipulation of wool— scenes with no obvious sexual content. I cannot fully address the first question, but I have found evidence to support the idea that the scenes with the wool are fraught with sexual symbolism. The evidence comes from the Ritual of Paskuwatti against Impotence, ably edited by Hoffner (1987). The first element is found in KUB 9.27 i 18-19:

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ed; gross' from the same root (Watkins, 1975: 15 f. and 18).

<sup>3</sup> As I have been reminded, the act depicted on the Inandik Vase is "*in modo bestiarum*".

nu KÁ.GAL.ḪI.A<sup>TM</sup> ŠA GI.ḪI.[A] iyami § [nam]ma=at IŠTU SÍG SA<sub>5</sub> SÍG BABBAR anda išḫiš[k]īmi

"I make a gate of reeds. Then I bind it around with *red and white wool*." (male patient is then given spindle and distaff. He passes through the gate. Spindle and distaff are taken away, and he is given a bow and arrows.)

The replacement of stereotypically feminine symbols by masculine ones to restore male sexual prowess is straightforward. The use of passage through a (specially constructed) gate to effect change from a negative to positive state is common in Hittite rituals (see Hoffner). Ritual manipulation of wool yarn of various colors (white, black, red, blue, yellow/green) is also frequent. But I know of no other such gate that is wrapped specifically with intertwined *red and white* wool. In fact, I have thus far found no other example using *just* these two colors besides that from Paskuwatti and that from our ritual passage. I believe we are justified in inferring that the twisting together of red and white wool symbolizes the successful sexual union of male and female.<sup>4</sup>

In our passage the belt braided of red and white wool is given to a palace official (a male), who puts it on his *antaka*-. I must defer to elsewhere discussion of the full evidence (Melchert, forthcoming), but I believe it is clear that *antaka*-/*antakitti*- means 'loins', i.e., the middle of the body (the logical place to put a belt!).<sup>5</sup> For *antaka*- 'loins' specifically as the seat of sexuality, I cite the following passage also from the Ritual of Paskuwatti (KUB (9.27+) 7.5 i 31-37):

našma=wa=za DUMU.MUNUS šuppeššaraš [ki?]<sup>7</sup>šat nu=wa=šši=kan andakitti=šši kattanta pait nu=wa kās tantukešnaš DUMU-aš šaknaš šēḫunaš nu=ddu=ššan UL wemiyat

<sup>4</sup> I cannot pursue here in depth the question of the color symbolism in the specific choices red and white. I am indebted to Christian Zinko for references to the ancient Indic doctrine that the fetus was formed by the joining of the man's seed and the woman's menstrual blood. See Luise Hilgenberg and Willibald Krifel, *Vāgbhaṭa's Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhitā. Ein altindisches Lehrbuch der Heilkunde*. Leiden 1941, 162 f. There also appears to be evidence for a similar notion in the ancient Near East. David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, New York 1992, 54 f. cites Leviticus Rabbah 14.9: "A woman's womb is full of standing blood. From there it flows out in menstruation. And at God's will, a drop of whiteness goes and drops into her, and instantly the fetus is created." See for a similar translation J. Israelstam, *Midrash Rabbah. Leviticus*, London 1939, 186, as well as for further lines in the same text discussing the role of male and female 'seed'. There thus seems some basis for supposing that white stands for the male (sperm) and red for the female (blood), but I would certainly not insist on this.

<sup>5</sup> Against the standard interpretation as 'room, chamber', see already Friedrich (1952: 23), who tentatively but correctly gives 'Bauch, Taille??', probably based on this very passage.

"Or [you beca]me<sup>7</sup> a virgin young woman. He went down to her loins. (But) this mortal (was only) one of feces and urine. He did not find you there." (cf. Hoffner [1987: 277]: "He went down to her bedchamber, but this mortal (was just) one of faeces and urine. He did not find you.").<sup>6</sup>

I believe the sentence with *antaka-* is as blunt as the following one. The man tried to have sex, but miserably failed. The sexual connotations of the palace official putting the belt of red and white wool on his *antaka-* should thus be obvious.

Given the supporting evidence from Paskuwatti for the sexual symbolism of the passage in KUB 11.25 (= 11.20), we may reasonably read the parallel from IBoT 2.96 in a similar fashion (see above). Note that the king (a male) actively winds white wool around the *karzan-*, which is clearly identified with the queen (female), who takes a passive role. Whether *karzan-* refers to a wool basket and its contents (Melchert, 1999: 125 ff.) or to a bobbin (Puhvel, 1997: 117) is immaterial for the sexual symbolism. Based on the color symbolism of the other passage, I would like to think that the *karzan-* contained red wool, but this cannot be proven.

There is in my view sufficient corroborating evidence for the notion that the specific manipulation of colored wool in the immediately preceding contexts symbolizes successful sexual union of male and female. Thus the interpretation of *ararkiškānzi* as "(while the king and queen) are copulating" does in fact make sense in the ritual context. The fragmentary nature of the evidence makes any conclusions about the larger ritual significance of this remarkable episode speculative.

One possibility is alluded to in my title. We know that the Hittites were much concerned with the fertility of the royal couple and the continuation of the royal line. I think it is unnecessary to quote in full such passages as KUB 29.1 iv 1-2; *ibid.* iv 17-20; KUB 24.1 iii 9 and iii 11-12 among many others. Our fragment may thus be part of a fertility rite designed to assure successful procreation by the king and queen. Since we know that the Hittite king was also responsible for the fertility and fruitfulness of humans, animals, and crops in the entire realm, it is also conceivable that the application of the fertility rite was more broadly conceived. However, I find this much less likely in the absence of any positive evidence that the Hittites would have made the conceptual leap from a sexual act by a single human couple (albeit the king and queen) to beneficial effects for all the subjects of the kingdom and their animals.

I wish to conclude by pointing to another possibility. One type of royal

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<sup>6</sup> The 'you' refers to Uliliyašši, the goddess who is the patron deity of the ritual.

ritual conspicuously lacking in our Hittite documents is that for a royal wedding. I find it inconceivable that no such ritual existed, given the elaborate rites attested for all other key events in the life of the royal couple. Perhaps, then, our fragment represents the 'consummation' portion of a much larger royal marriage ritual. In any case, I see no alternative but to conclude that *ararkiškanzī* does refer to an act of ritual sex by the Hittite king and queen. We may hope that new evidence will in the future make clear its larger significance.

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