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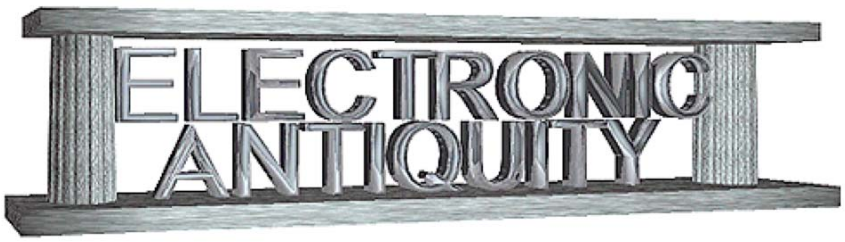

MYTHOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN THE HITTITE COLONIZATION OF ANATOLIA

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Because this is a Hittite paper in a predominantly classical context, I should perhaps begin with a brief introduction on the Hittites before we get to their mythology.

Hittite is the oldest recorded Indo-European language, attested in cuneiform script in the second millennium BCE. When we first meet them in texts, the Hittites already inhabit large parts of central Anatolia, but we do not have clear evidence regarding how much earlier they entered Asia Minor and from where. There is a long-standing debate among linguists and archaeologists about the chronology and genealogy of the IE Anatolian languages, and the current trend is to date the migrations of the Hittites and their "cousins", the Luwians and the Palaians, at least a thousand years, probably more, before the first written documents, i.e. somewhere in the 3rd or possibly the 4th mill. BCE. This situation, among other things, may account for the fact that the Hittites did not leave behind any explicit traditions about their origins, unlike the Romans, the Greeks, or the Israelites. Still, scholars have repeatedly scrutinized the Hittite texts and the archaeological record for some distant echoes and reflections about their origins and their migrations into Asia Minor.

In north-central Anatolia the Hittites encountered the highly advanced culture of the Hattians, an autochtonous people whose

language is perhaps distantly related to some western Caucasian dialects. The encounter between the IE Hittites and the local Hattians resulted in a remarkable fusion between two entirely different cultures. The dominant Hittites adopted completely the cultural assets of their predecessors, especially in the domains of religion and mythology. However, this cultural fusion between Hittites and Hattians, not unlike the one between Romans and Etruscans, must have been preceded by fierce encounters of which we have very little information, most of it embedded in cryptic mythological descriptions. This laconic characterization should supply in a nutshell the background for the following myth and its decipherment.

Let me add a short note on ethno-geography. In the early 2nd millennium BCE the Hattians controlled the Land of Hatti, comprising the area within the large bend of the Halys River, Hittite Marassanta. Their major kingdoms were Hattush, the future capital of the Hittites, and Zalpa on the Black Sea. To the southeast lay the predominantly Hittite kingdom of Kanish or Nesha. In the mid-18th century Anitta, king of Nesha, conquered in a sweeping campaign the entire Land of Hatti, as well as other parts of central Anatolia, thus founding the first Hittite empire, which lasted, with ups and downs, for more than 500 years. It is from the name of this city of Kanish/Nesha that the Hittites took the self-designation of their own language, Neshili, which has erroneously come to be known in modern scholarship as “Hittite” (Singer 1984).

One of the earliest myths in Hittite literature is the tale about "The Queen of Kanesh, her thirty sons and thirty daughters" (Otten 1973). The mythical time of this origin legend is set before Anitta's takeover of central Anatolia, but the text was actually written down in Old Hittite script in the mid-17th century. You may find several English translations and numerous discussions of this intriguing text. The translation below follows that of Watkins(2004):

The Queen of Kanesh bore thirty sons in a single year. She said, 'What a monster is this which I have borne?' She filled baskets with fat, put her sons in them, and launched them in the river. The river carried them to the sea to the land of Zalp(uw)a. But the gods took them up out of the sea and reared them.

When the years had passed the Queen again gave birth, (this time) to thirty daughters. And she herself reared them. The sons are making their way back to Kanesh, driving a donkey. When they reached the city of Tamarmara, they are saying: 'Here you have heated up the bedroom so that the donkey *tries to copulate*.' The men of the city replied: 'As far as we have seen, a donkey *tries to copulate* anyway.' The boys countered:

'As far as we have seen, a woman bears [only one] son [a year], but one gave birth to us (all) at once.' The men of the city retorted: 'Once our queen of Kanesh gave birth to thirty daughters at once, but the sons have disappeared.' The boys said to themselves: 'Whom are we seeking? We have found our mother there. Come, let us go to Kanesh.' When they went to Kanesh the gods put another appearance on them so their mother does not recognize them, and she gave her own daughters to her own sons. The older sons did not recognize their own sisters. But the youngest [said]: '... should we take our own sisters in marriage? Do not stain yourselves [with] impiety. [It is not] right.' But they sle[pt] with them. [...

As it happens, at this dramatic point the tablet breaks off. On the other side of the tablet the narrative continues after a brief gap. It recounts the struggle that broke out between Zalpa, where the boys were raised, and Hattusha, the future capital of the Hittites. Of course, Hattusha has the upper hand after three generations of hostilities and the city of Zalpa is destroyed. This part of the story is no longer in mythical time, but rather it portrays the early history of the Hittite kingdom. For the sake of precision I should add that the connection between the two parts of the legend (on two sides of the tablet) is conjectural, and some scholars would even doubt that they belong to the same text. For me, however, the two sides represent "the sin and its punishment", an aetiological justification for the domination of Hattusha and its ruling dynasty (Singer 1984; 1995; for another interpretation see Gilan 2007).

You have probably recognized in this concise tale plenty of mythologems familiar from other parts of the world, including Greek and Vedic Indian mythology. The baby in the basket floating in the river recalls of course Moses and Sargon of Akkad. More specifically, the motif of exposing boy babies and keeping the girl babies recurs in the legend of the Amazons, who according to Greek tradition lived in Anatolia, more or less in the same region on the southern shore of the Black Sea where Zalpa must be located.

The prodigious multiple birth has been compared by Cal Watkins to the Asvamedha ritual in the Rigveda (RV 10.86.23) and to the Greek legend of the Danaids, all three reflecting a common IE heritage. The Greek tale of origins, as recounted by Aeschylus in "The Suppliants", recounts the endogamic marriage of parallel cousins, the fifty sons of Aigyptos with the fifty daughters of Danaos. As forcefully argued by Emile Benveniste in his 1949 'La légende des Danaïdes", the central issue of "The Suppliants" was the conflict of Greek exogamy (including cross-cousin marriage) and Egyptian endogamy (including parallel-

cousin marriage). In his horror of the imminent incest, Danaus orders his daughters to slay their husbands on the wedding night, but one of them, Hypermestra, spares her husband, Lynceus, who becomes the founder of the royal house of Argos and of the Danaoi. Following Benveniste, Watkins also justifies the search for traces of hidden Indo-European themes in Classical Greek authors, even if they were no longer valid in fifth-century Athenian society.

Returning to the Hittite tale of the Queen of Kanesh, the incest of brothers and sisters is probably the primeval cause for the downfall of both Zalpa and Kanesh, though the latter is not explicitly mentioned in the second part of the text. According to Hittite law and custom, brother-sister incest was considered a severely punishable abomination. This was apparently not the case among the indigenous populations of Anatolia, as demonstrated by the treaty between Huqqana and the Hittite king Shuppiluliuma.

Huqqana was the king or tribal chief of Hayasha, a small land in the mountains east of Hatti. In order to guarantee his political cooperation against the Hurrians, he was given in marriage a sister of the Hittite king, thus joining the extended royal family of Hatti. But since his behavior was expected to be "uncivilized", the treaty formulated for him included several sexual prohibitions to be avoided at all price (Cohen 2002: 79 ff.). Let me quote a couple of the good "counsels" offered to Huqqana (Beckman 1999: 31 f.):

> (§ 25) The sister whom I, My Majesty, have given to you as your wife has many sisters from her own family as well as from her extended family. They belong to your extended family because you have taken their sister. But for Hatti it is an important custom that a brother does not take (sexually) his sister or female cousin. It is not permitted.
>
> In Hatti whoever commits such an act does not remain alive but is put to death. Because your land is ignorant ("barbarian") it is in conflict (with Hittite custom). (There,) one quite regularly takes his sister or female cousin. But in Hatti it is not permitted.
>
> (§ 26) And if on occasion a sister of your wife, or the wife of a brother, or a female cousin comes to you, give her to eat and to drink and make merry! But you shall not desire

> to take her (sexually). It is not permitted, and people are put to death as a result of that act. ...

We have no further information whether Huqqana abided by these strict Hittite mores or whether he carried on his frivolous ways.

The hidden message of the Queen of Kanesh tale could be a similar clash between the social customs of the Hattian and the Neshite (=Hittite) population groups, which resulted in the downfall of those who engaged in abominable sexual practices. It may perhaps seem strange that the ultimate beneficiary from the downfall of Zalpa and Kanesh is the originally Hattian city of Hattush, but then, the myth had to take into account the political realities as well. Hattush, modern-day Boghazköy, became the new Hittite capital in the 17th c. BCE. In his volume of translated "Hittite Myths" (1998), Hoffner has nicknamed the Queen of Kanesh story as "A Tale of Two Cities", borrowing from Dickens. Actually, a more appropriate nickname would be "A Tale of Three Cities" (Kanesh, Zalpa, and Hattusha), or perhaps "The Kanesh Outrage", which I borrowed from the story of "The Gibeah Outrage" in Judges 19-21. This story, which recounts a horrendous sexual aggression committed by the men of Gibeah, explicates how Gibeah, the seat of Saul, the first king of Israel, lost its political supremacy, leaving the stage open for the ascent of Jerusalem as the new capital of Israel.

And what about the role of the Donkey in the Queen of Kanesh myth? You remember the conversation between the thirty sons who are heading back home and the people of a little town where they spend a night. According to Watkins's translation the donkey 'tries to copulate' in the heated room, but in fact, the rendering of the verbal form *ark-* is less obvious.

It may refer to "climbing", or "mounting" in a general sense, but also to sexually "mounting" an animal (Melchert 2001). In Hoffner's translation the donkey "climbs up (the staircase)" to the second floor where people are supposed to sleep but not donkeys. Watkins takes his sexual interpretation of the passage quite far, comparing it to the ceremonial sacrifice of an aroused horse in the Indian Asvamedha ritual and to the implied sacrifice of an aroused donkey in Pindar's 'Hyperborean digression' of Perseus. Other commentators, including myself, would stop short with a less pregnant interpretation of the 'donkey episode'. It may simply serve as a literary device to trigger the mutual recounting of strange episodes: a donkey that sleeps with his owners and a queen who gives birth to thirty babies in a single year.

To sum up, it would seem that from the various interpretations given to the Queen of Kanesh myth, the one explicating it as a charter myth establishing a taboo against inadmissible sexual practices is the most plausible. One may perhaps also find in it a distant echo for a Hittite immigration into central Anatolia, or actually, a re-immigration or "return narrative", if we take into account the brothers' to-and-fro wanderings from Zalpa to Kanesh and back (Oettinger 2004: 363). "Return narratives", as best exemplified by the Greek Nostoi, are often used to justify a conquest or a colonization. For example, the return of the Heraclids to the Peloponnessus, which may reflect a Dorian migration. From a much later period, one may compare the Ostrogoths, who justified their invasion of Italy through a myth according to which their king Theodoric merely "returned" to Italy after being expulsed from there by King Otoaker ("Hildebrandlied"). Obviously, some of these "return narratives" may have had some factual background, for instance, if one assumes that the 8th century BCE Greek colonization of Pithekoussai and Kyme is related in any way to the Mycenaean presence in Ischia itself and in the nearby island of Vivara. And with this happy landing in the Bay of Naples, I conclude my concise presentation.

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