

# STRUCTURES OF POWER

LAW AND GENDER ACROSS THE  
ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND BEYOND



*edited by*  
Ilan Peled



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## Females as Sources of Authority in Hittite Government and Religion

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The culture of Hittite Anatolia of the Late Bronze Age was most definitely patriarchal in nature and generally unfavorable to women, at least as judged by today's more progressive values. Social attitudes in Ḫatti are well exemplified by an incident in a folk tale in which an offended man lashes out at his wife: "You are a woman and think like one!<sup>1</sup> You know nothing at all!"<sup>2</sup> The Hittite Laws inform us that a woman's monthly wage was half or less than that of a man,<sup>3</sup> and that when partners of equal social status divorced, the male walked off with the greater portion of the children.<sup>4</sup> Marriages were generally patrilocal, and with the payment of the bride price, a girl entered under the authority of her new spouse or of his father.<sup>5</sup>

On the rare occasion when closer specification was felt to be necessary, individuals were identified by patronyms.<sup>6</sup> Despite attempts by various scholars to demonstrate the practice of matrilineality in Ḫatti,<sup>7</sup> it remains clear that property and social position were passed down through the male line, as shown both by the Laws and by sparse documentary evidence.<sup>8</sup> However, women did have a role to play in this matter, for a new husband might be adopted as son by his bride's father. Indeed, several Hittite kings seem to have attained their supreme positions after marrying the daughter of their predecessors,<sup>9</sup> and henceforth referred to themselves as the "sons" of the latter.

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\* CTH refers to entries in Laroche 1971, as updated by the Konkordanz der hethitischen Keilschrifttafeln (<http://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/hetkonk/>). Accessed June 27, 2017. Further abbreviations are those of the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1980-).

<sup>1</sup> MUNUS-*nili*ṣyaṣz zik; literally, "you are of womanly nature."

<sup>2</sup> KUB 24.8 (CTH 360) i 36-37; see edition in Siegelová 1971, pp. 6-7. For a full English translation of the *Tale of Appu*, see Hoffner 1998, pp. 63-65. Given the limits of our sources, it is probably futile to interrogate them for subtleties beyond the assignment of gender identities on a naïve biological basis.

<sup>3</sup> §§24, 158 (CTH 291-292); see edition in Hoffner 1997, pp. 32-33, 126-27.

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<sup>4</sup> §31 (CTH 291). But upon the dissolution of the marriage of a free woman with a male slave, the mother received all but one child (§32). See edition in Hoffner 1997, pp. 40-41.

<sup>5</sup> Beckman 1986, pp. 15-17.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, in some colophons the scribe names his father. See that of Ḫanikuili, son of Anu-šar-ilāni, in KBo 19.99, which I discuss in Beckman 1983b, pp. 103-104.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Riemschneider 1971 and Bin-Nun 1975.

<sup>8</sup> For a full discussion of this question, see Beckman 1986.

<sup>9</sup> This is certainly the case for Arnuwanda I (Beal 1983, p. 119) and may also be true of Zidanta I and Alluwamna.



Figure 8.1. Central panel in Chamber A at Yazılıkaya. After Akurgal 1961, p. 79, Abb. 19

This expedient is reflected in the general principle of royal succession set forth in the Proclamation of King Telipinu:<sup>10</sup>

Let only a prince of the first rank, a son, become king! If there is no first-rank prince, then whoever is a son of the second rank — let this one become king! If there is no prince, no (male) heir, then whoever is a first-rank daughter — let them take a husband for her, and let him become king!

Thus, in the ideal Hittite society, a female might at best serve as a conduit for the legitimate transmission of political authority between men across generations.

Yet among the Thousand Gods, as the Hittites referred to their pantheon, hegemony was shared by a married couple, the Storm-god of Ḫatti and the Sun-goddess of the city of Arinna, a pair later syncretized with the Hurrian Teššup and Ḫepat. These partners are depicted on the front panel of Chamber A of the rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya near the Hittite capital, each at the head of a procession of deities of their respective gender (fig. 8.1). The Sun-goddess, who despite her designation was predominantly a chthonic, rather than a solar, deity,<sup>11</sup> exercised a definite influence on human political life. A prayer addressed to her begins:<sup>12</sup>

To the Sun-goddess of Arinna, My Lady, Lady of the Lands of Ḫatti, Queen of Heaven and Earth, Lady of the kings and queens of Ḫatti, Torch of Ḫatti, the one who rules the kings and queens of Ḫatti. The one whom you look upon with favor as king or queen is right with you, O Sun-goddess of Arinna, My Lady. You are the one who chooses (for rule) and the one who removes (from rule). In respect to the other gods and befitting the dignity of the Storm-god of Nerik and the Storm-god of Zippalanda, your sons, you took for yourself the lands of Ḫatti as your share (of the world).

<sup>10</sup> KBo 3.1 (CTH 19) ii 36–39; see edition in Hoffmann 1984, pp. 32–33.

<sup>11</sup> Beckman 2011.

<sup>12</sup> KUB 29.19 + 1193/u (CTH 383) i 1–13; translation adapted from Singer 2002, p. 97.



Figure 8.2. The Hittite social universe

The title “Great King of Ḫatti” was synonymous with “Chief Priest of the Sun-goddess of Arinna,”<sup>13</sup> which indicates that on the ideological plane the human monarch functioned as steward or regent of this deity.<sup>14</sup> Since she also bears the epithet “Arinniti,” “She of Arinna” — an adjective of appurtenance borrowed from the Hattic language of central Anatolia — and plays a prominent role in the few religious texts preserved from the pre-Hittite culture that employed this tongue,<sup>15</sup> it is reasonable to conclude that her pairing with the Storm-god of Indo-European origin<sup>16</sup> was the result of an accommodation of indigenous beliefs with the cosmological conceptions of the latecomers to the region.

How do we square this proprietorship of the land by a goddess with the inferior position of those who shared her gender among the human population of Ḫatti? The answer is very simple: There is no necessary correlation between the social status of human women and the position of female divinities within the religious system professed by their culture.<sup>17</sup> The human and the divine are entirely different in essence and functioning, even if men and women often think about their deities by means of analogies to the human body, emotions, and experience. Despite the reverence shown to the Virgin Mary in her numerous manifestations in pre-modern Roman Catholic Europe, the societies of this period and region remained thoroughly patriarchal.

But to the extent (as was indeed the case in Ḫatti) that the gods of a culture are immanent in, and representative of, the various aspects of the cosmos within which humans exist — a cosmos, moreover, in which natural reproduction is sexual — some of these beings are unsurprisingly conceived of as feminine in biological sex. The realms of vegetal fertility and the birth of animals come immediately to mind as provinces frequently assigned cross-culturally to female divinities. Thus, among the Hittites, the Sun-goddess of Arinna, who was alternatively referred to as the Sun-goddess of the Earth,<sup>18</sup> embodied the matrices — the soil and the womb — from which new life emerged, while the Storm-god contributed the necessary fructifying fluid in the form of rainfall and underground waters.<sup>19</sup>

When it came to interaction between men and women on the one hand and gods on the other, the royal couple served as the point of intersection between the two levels of the universe (fig. 8.2). The king and queen represented and argued for the interests of human beings before their divine masters, as illustrated, for example, by the series of prayers in which King Muršili II pleads for the abatement of a plague ravaging the land.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, through oracles, omens, dreams, etc., the monarchs received information from the gods, including their complaints about human activities and their requests from their mortal subjects.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For relevant passages, see Taggar-Cohen 2006b, p. 369.

<sup>14</sup> Beckman 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Klinger 1996, pp. 141–47.

<sup>16</sup> West 2007, p. 247.

<sup>17</sup> Zsolnay 2009; and cf. Beckman 2000a.

<sup>18</sup> Soysal 2004, p. 325.

<sup>19</sup> On his association with the latter, see Deighton 1982.

<sup>20</sup> Translated in Singer 2002, pp. 46–69.

<sup>21</sup> On means of communication between men and gods, see Beckman 1999b.

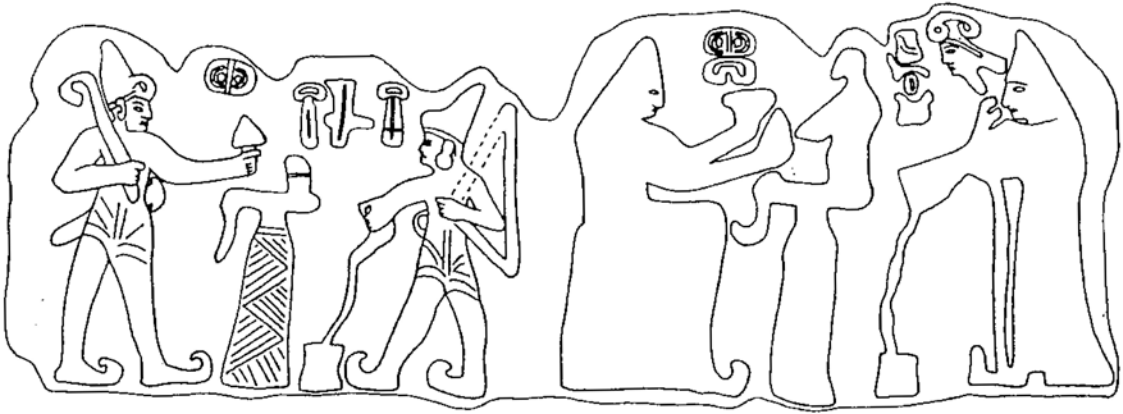


Figure 8.3. Rock relief at Fraktin showing Ḫattušili III and Puduḫepa at worship.  
After Savaş 2001, p. 611, fig. 2

Notionally, all cult was carried out by the king in his capacity as Chief Priest, although in practice many religious duties would have been delegated to technically more qualified subordinate specialists.

For her part, the Hittite queen stood at the head of all women active within the religious establishment, bearing in this function the traditional title *Tawannanna*.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, this position would be retained by the queen after the death of her husband, passing to the spouse of his successor only upon her own demise. The unfinished rock relief at Fraktin (fig. 8.3), which represents King Ḫattušili III and Queen Puduḫepa pouring libations to the Storm-god and the Sun-goddess, respectively, illustrates the gendered and parallel devotional responsibilities of the royal couple.

Furthermore, seemingly owing to her importance in the realm of worship, the queen — alone among her sisters — exercised real authority in secular matters. The best-known of the Hittite queens in this respect was the aforementioned Queen Puduḫepa,<sup>23</sup> who was active both in the administration of palace affairs and on the stage of international diplomacy, corresponding as an equal with Ramesses II of Egypt.<sup>24</sup> To a certain extent, her prominence was due to circumstance: Her husband Ḫattušili III was a usurper and probably relied in part for support in his claim to the throne upon Puduḫepa's family ties with the highest strata of the society of Kizzuwatna,<sup>25</sup> which was a significant component of the Hittite empire. In addition, Ḫattušili was sickly throughout his lifetime, and probably died relatively young, leaving Puduḫepa to act as a kind of regent for their son and his successor Tudḫaliya IV.

<sup>22</sup> Beckman 2012.

<sup>23</sup> See the sketch of her career in Otten 1975. Like Naqia/Zakutu in late eighth-century Assyria (Melville 1999) or the Empress Dowager Cixi (Tzu-hsi) in the second half of the nineteenth century in China (Chang 2013), Puduḫepa moved into a vacuum left by weak or underage males, and exercised power in their names. After all, the dynamics of gender relations within a

family — even a royal one — may depend more on the constellation of personalities that constitute it than upon the dictates of general societal attitudes.

<sup>24</sup> As evidenced by the letter KUB 21.38 (CTH 176), translated in Beckman 1999a, pp. 131–35 (Text 22E).

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion on the life and health of this king, see Ünal 1974.

Nonetheless, participation in governance is documented for other queens. For instance, King Muršili II says of his stepmother, the Babylonian second wife and widow of his father Šuppiluliuma I (a woman known to us only by the title Tawannanna, which seems to have served as her personal name in Ḫattuša): “Just as she administered the palace and the land of Ḫatti [in the time of my father and the] time of my brother, [she likewise administered] them at this time (viz., under my reign) too.”<sup>26</sup> Although this passage indeed indicates a sphere of activity in which a woman exercised administrative authority, the limits to her independence are revealed by the fact that it is drawn from a document in which the king defends her removal from office at his instigation.<sup>27</sup>

Returning now to the care and feeding of the gods, many of the lesser cultic servants of goddesses were also women, undoubtedly because they shared with their mistresses a common gender identity.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, animal offerings to goddesses were frequently drawn from the females of the respective species — ewes, say, in preference to rams — just as dark-colored beasts were considered the most appropriate gifts for chthonic deities.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, priestesses were also often attendant upon male divinities, for women made up at least half of the communities whose *raison d’être*, according to the Hittite worldview, was simply to supply the basic needs of their divine masters through praise, offerings, entertainment, and the production of foodstuffs for their temple establishments. If the entire community was meant to be involved in this enterprise, it was only fitting that women be represented in most if not all of its phases and aspects.

But in the province of magic, women were not “tokens” — included simply in order to fill out the representation of the human world — but rather took an equal if not leading role, making up a little more than half of the individuals attested by name as authors of rituals.<sup>30</sup> This rough numerical parity with the male magical experts is most striking and is in accord with the preponderance of goddesses among deities of magic; Ḫannaḫanna, Iṣḫara, Šaušga, and Kamrušepa, all women, are the most important divine healers in Hittite religion.<sup>31</sup>

Among references to female magical practitioners, the most common designation is the Sumerogram <sup>MUNUS</sup>ŠU.GI, “Old Woman.”<sup>32</sup> Although this writing appears in other contexts with its literal and basic meaning of “aged female human,” and in such circumstances undoubtedly has a different Hittite reading, in most if not all religious texts it stands for Hittite *ḫašauwa*.<sup>33</sup> This Hittite term literally indicates not “old woman,” but rather “(she) of birth” — the midwife.<sup>34</sup> Over time, it had become a general designation for a female ritual expert, sometimes applied to a woman additionally called by another title, such as “wet-nurse.” The linguistic and sociological association of the midwife with wider healing competencies is also known from many other pre-modern cultures. Compare the French usage of the expression *sage femme* for “midwife” alongside *accoucheuse*.

<sup>26</sup> KUB 14.4 (CTH 70) i 10’–12’.

<sup>27</sup> Miller 2014.

<sup>28</sup> On women in Hittite worship, see Taggar-Cohen 2006a and 2006b, pp. 312–68.

<sup>29</sup> Haas 2003, pp. 400–401.

<sup>30</sup> Beckman 1993, pp. 36–37.

<sup>31</sup> For references, see Beckman 1993, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Beckman 2016.

<sup>33</sup> On the midwife and her designations in Ḫatti, see Beckman 1983a, pp. 232–35.

<sup>34</sup> Beckman 1983a, pp. 232–33.



Another expression meaning “midwife” is MUNUS *ḫarnauwaš*, which may be rendered literally as “woman of the birth-stool.” In a passage from one of her prayers on behalf of her ailing husband, Queen Puduḫepa tells a goddess:<sup>35</sup>

Among men it is said: “To a ‘woman of the birth-stool’ a deity is favorable.” I, Puduḫepa, am a “woman of the birth-stool,” (and since) I have devoted myself to your son (the Storm-god of Nerik), yield to me, O Sun-goddess of Arinna, my lady! Grant to me what [I ask of you]! Grant life to [Ḫattušili], your servant! Through [the Fate-deities] and the Mother-goddesses let long years and days be given to him.

When we examine the activities of actual midwives in the Hittite birth rituals,<sup>36</sup> we find that their duties fall into two categories. First, there are the physical tasks involved in any birth: The midwife prepares the equipment necessary for parturition and thereafter delivers the child. Second, the midwife recites incantations on behalf of the newborn, beseeching the gods to remove evil influences and to grant a desirable fate to the child. One such speech reads, in part:<sup>37</sup>

O Sun-goddess of the Earth, may you seize [(various evils)]! And further [...] you shall not let them loose (again)! But for the child continually give life, fitness, and long years!

Note the similarity of this speech to the request made by Puduḫepa on behalf of Ḫattušili in her prayer just quoted: In each instance, life and long years are requested from the divine addressee. The significance of the queen’s reference to herself as a midwife is now apparent. The Hittites believed that the gods lent a favorable ear to the midwife when she sought a good fate for the newborn, and through her metaphor Puduḫepa strengthens her own request for vitality for the invalid king.

If the midwife displayed a special talent in securing divine favor for the neonate, then other individuals might also on occasion seek out her services. That is, it was not only the practical expertise of the Old Women in connection with birth and other medical and magical problems that accounts for the prominent place of women in the healing arts of Ḫatti, but also the particular favor with which the utterance of a midwife was thought to be received by the gods. Given the great importance of recitations in Hittite magic,<sup>38</sup> the prominence of the eloquent woman in such endeavors is hardly surprising.

But the dealings of the Old Woman with the supernatural did not end with healing. Within the ceremonies of the state cult she usually conducts the rite known as *mukeššar*, “evocation,”<sup>39</sup> by which a god or goddess is summoned and drawn to the site of worship along paths strewn with fruit and other foodstuffs. The <sup>MUNUS</sup>ŠU.GI was also the practitioner in charge of the performance of oracles of various types. During the early years of the Hittite state, at least some Old Women, like the members of many other categories of religious experts, seem to have been organized in a guild associated with the royal palace. We may draw this conclusion from the appearance in older texts (or later copies of such) of expressions such as “Chief of the Old Women,” “Old Woman of the Palace,” and “Old Woman of the King.” I suspect that

<sup>35</sup> KUB 21.27 (CTH 384) ii 15–23; see edition in Sürenhagen 1981, pp. 112–13.

<sup>36</sup> The corpus of Hittite-language material is edited in Beckman 1983a.

<sup>37</sup> KBo 17.60 rev. 8’–11’ (CTH 430.3.A); see edition in Beckman 1983a, pp. 60–61.

<sup>38</sup> Beckman 1999b.

<sup>39</sup> CHD L–M, 324–26.

these terms refer to a college of diviners, since the performance of oracles is the only activity of the Old Woman definitely documented in Old Hittite sources. The implied demand of King Ḫattušili I<sup>40</sup> in his *Testament*,<sup>41</sup> that a female intimate avoid consulting with the Old Women, was probably intended to counter any attempt by this group of ladies to interfere in political or dynastic matters through their predictive faculties.<sup>42</sup>

To sum up, Hittite society was basically patriarchal, but the role of the female was appropriately recognized and honored in religious conceptions and cultic practice. Since women held up half the sky, their contributions were welcomed, even if the direction of household and state was normally reserved for senior males.

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<sup>40</sup> KUB 1.16 + KUB 40.65 (CTH 6); see translation in Beckman 2000b. The text in question is a Hittite-Akkadian bilingual.

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<sup>41</sup> de Martino 1989.

<sup>42</sup> Beckman 2016.

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