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“The Role of Women in Politics in Hittite Society”

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Research Question: What was the role of Hittite Queens in Politics in Hittite Empire Period Between 1380-1210 B.C?

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Abstract:

Political rights carry important role in today's world. However, it is ironical that there are many countries where these rights are underestimated. About 3000 years ago, in Hittite Empire, women who belonged to royal family had political rights and queens could contribute to politics. This situation is an important development in history because it proved that women can participate in politics and share the rulership.

In this essay, the role of Hittite Queens in politics in Hittite Empire Era between 1380-1210 B.C. is examined. After the researches, it is seen that queens had an active role in politics. Queens had great authorities in Hittite Empire and they had rights to rule the country when King went to war or had an illness. In the essay, transcriptions from famous archaeologists and Hittitologists are used as primary sources as well as seal prints. To concretize these aspects, Queen Puduhepa example is given and Hittite Queen's authorities are reflected by using this example. Queen Puduhepa example also reflects rights of women who belonged to royal class in Hittite society since she ruled the country for many years. In addition, considering the fact that history must be examined objectively, comparisons between Hittite Empire and the most powerful empires of that time is made. It has seen that in Mesopotamian and Egyptian Empires queens no political powers during 1380-1210 B.C. Finally, in the essay ,the rights of women is limited to rights of royal women since all the written documents state court life.

(Word Count:251)

Introduction:

Women's right subject that keeps its prevalence since 19th Century is of capital importance today. In particular, enfranchisement of women is essential for the democratization process of countries. However, it is upsetting that this right is given to women by most countries hardly in 20th Century, because almost 3000 years ago, there has been woman leaders who has lived and left impression in Anatolia, Egypt and Mesopotamia. At this point, origin of gender inequality should be sought in history. Taking women's undeniable contribution to progression of civilizations into consideration, analyzing history with women's point of view may reveal how women took part in society. There has been so many researches about Nefertiti, Semiramis, Cleopatra and Theodora, but there are not enough scientific research about women leaders in Hittite Empire, one of the biggest empires of the period that lived in Anatolia. Political effect of women in Hittite Empire has great importance, because many states that lived in Anatolia effected beliefs and customs of subsequent civilizations. Aim of the study is to analyse role and importance of women¹ (queens) on the political life of Hittite Empire as one of the strongest states of the period that were based in Anatolia. By this means, an objective epistemological evaluation of subject will be made.

Subject of study is focused only on political role of women in Empire Era because of Hittites' long sovereignty period. Besides, by taking into account that evaluating history within the context of the conditions of the era would be the most scientific approach, political role of women is limited to Hittite Queens and women who belonged to royal family, because Hittite Empire was theocratic and governed with autocracy, that is, the democratic system of today wasn't present in social structure of that period. Content of the study is to determine the

¹ It should be noted that only women from palace can have political rights in Hittite Empire Period

role of Hittite Queens on politics and to find out their effects during the period by making comparisons with the authorities of the king. For that, both archaeological and philological documents will be used. Primary sources are used from the books world renowned of archaeologists and Hittitologists Sedat Alp, Emmanuelle Laroche, Ekrem Akurgal, Itamar Singer and Muhibbe Darga where the large material of transcription² from Hittite tablets and documents are placed.

² Transcription: Hittitologists convert Hittite cuneiform tablets into Latin alphabet in order to make tablet reading easy. After this process, translation begins. Since Hittitologists convert these tablets into modern languages, this is considered as a primary source in the essay.

The Role of Hittite Empire Queens in Politics: (14th-12th B.C)

1.1 Queens and Their General Authorities in the Light of the Documents from the Kingdom Archive:

It is possible to determine the role of women in political life from the archaeological and philological documents found in Hattusa, the capital of Hittites. Considering the fact that these documents have been made written by the courtiers, it can be said that they do not precisely represent the society of Hittite but give detailed information about the life of the court. The information about the general structure of society can only be obtained from law texts. Laws are regulated according to independence or the captivity of society. “Women are qualified as independent or captive in accordance with the law.” (Kinal,F. 1956, 360) Practicing upon these documents, it is determined that the highest rank for independent women is the queenship. Women, except for the Queen had no role in politics due to the fact that Hittite Empire was governed by absolute monarchy. Therefore, queenship represents role of women in political life of Hittites.

Even in Egyptian and Mesopotamian “modern” civilizations of the period, the queen was considered as wife of king with vast authorities and had no authority apart from participating in a few religious rituals. On the contrary, the queen is in the position of using her authority independent from the king in Hittites. Due to the lack of evidence it is impossible to make comparisons with Hittite Empire. However, it is believed that these queens were just symbolical.³

³ During the excavations in Egypt there wasn't any document found which mentioned the authorities of queens. This situation proves that between 14th-12th B.C, queens didn't have enough power to contribute to political life in Egypt whereas in Hittite Kingdom queen had a great influence in politics. In Egypt, main duties of queen are to give birth of dauphins and attend to religious rituals.(Kuhrt, Amelie. Eski Çağ'da Yakındoğu Cilt I. İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009.) In the same way in Mesopotamian civilizations queens didn't have authorities. 400 years after the collapse of Hittite Kingdom, in Neo-Asyrian Period, Shammurat (Semiramis) had a short rulership. The main reason

Queenship is arranged in hierarchical order in Hittites. According to this order, there are two main titles for the queen: First one is “SAL.LUGAL.GAL” which means “The Great Queen”, also known as “Tawananna” (**Bin-nun, S.R.1975, 160; Darga, M.1984, 22**) that is the ruling queen’s title. Tawananna’s authorities start with inheritance of throne by the queen, and continue after death of the king as “ruling queen” during the governance of the king’s son. (**Darga,M.1974, 939**) The great king Suppiluliuma I’s wife Tawananna has inherited the throne after her husband’s death and reigned with title and authorities of “ruling queen” during King Mursili II period (1321-1295 BC). Another title for queen is “Legit queen” which is given to the new kings’ wives. While Tawananna title is given to king’s mother, Legit Queen can have Tawananna title when Ruling Queen dies. Tawananna title is also considered as equally concerned with politics as the Hittite King himself, gives queen the right to involve international law. Tawananna is also considered as independent representative of kingdom. This situation signifies importance given by the Hittites to women. Respect to the mother is also politically important, because both queens can involve political life in these circumstances. Under these circumstances, king makes some of his decisions together with two queens. In addition, king can take the opinions of a privy council called “Panku”(**Bryce ,T. 2002, 23**) which can offer suggestions to king only about the governance of country and cannot interfere in legislative, executive and judicial bodies alone.

Moreover, there is great significance of queen in sorting the dauphins. This situation can be considered as reflection of the role of queens in political life as the Hittite kings are polygamous. The most important responsibilities are given to princes and princesses whose

of her rulership was that, her son was too young to rule a country. Therefore, she ruled the country until her son grew up. During her rulership, she didn’t have much authorities and she wasn’t free to give her own decisions. This situation shows that Hittite Kingdom was more civilized and gave political rights to queenship title. (Saggs, H.W.F, *The Mighty That Was Assyria*. London: Sidgwick& Jackson, pg 78)

mother has the highest title. There are concubines with various titles in seraglio. After the children of the mother queen, children of the wife called as “*esertu*” becomes dauphine. The children who are born from low status concubines called “*naptartu*” and “MUNUS.SUHUR.LAL” can never have right to be dauphins. According to rules of succession established by King Telipinu, the right to be dauphin is only given to sons whose mothers are from the highest two levels. If there is no prince from the highest rank, son of the mother from the second rank can be king, but in case of absence of a prince and dauphine, the son-in-law of a woman whose daughter is from the highest rank becomes king. In this case, it is determined that Tawanna’s sons are first candidates for throne, but in an absence of a son, succession passes to son of the wife who is called “*esertu*”. This system applied in choosing dauphine is not only fair but also reflects political significance of queen and is strategically important so as to minimize the fight for the throne as it sets up rules. (Bryce,T. 2002, 29)

1.2 Queen Danuhepa Conflict which Reflects Respect for Queenship Title:

Tawananna’s maintenance in power after death of their husbands caused a number of problems about chronological order of Hittite Queens and revealed difference of opinion between historians. The most important of them is queen conflict from the first period of Mursili’s reign, which originated from Bogazkoy. It is indicated that Mursili II is seen with the queen Tawananna on some seal prints that names of queens were written on. Also on other seals, Mursili II is mentioned along with Queen Danuhepa, and on another seal print, is seen with a woman whose name is read as “*Gassulawia*”. Considering symbols that generate name of queen, it is denoted that the name Danuhepa is documented on the seals jointly with the names of two kings other than Mursili. One of these kings is Muvatalli, and the other is his son Urhi Tesup. Historians suggested two possibilities for this complex situation:

First one is that there are two queens with name of “Danuhepa”. Danuhepa I is wife of Mursili II, Danuhepa II is wife of Muvatalli and mother of Urhi Tesup. Therefore, when Urhi Tesup succeeded to throne, Danuhepa continued to be in the government with the title of Tawananna.

Second possibility is that there is only one queen with this name. Mursili II married very young Danuhepa on his late stages of kingdom, and queen governed country with the title of “ruling queen” in the period of her grandson Urhi Tesup, after the death of her husband. According to this suggested possibility, her name is written on seals along with three kings. A seal print belonging solely to elder queen Danuhepa was discovered at Bogazkoy in 1991.

If an evaluation of two suggested possibilities is to be made, second possibility is more likely to be sound. The names Mursili II and “*Gassulawia*” are seen on only one seal print. The piece of seal where title of name is written is broken but it is denoted that it can be identified as “The Elder Queen”. The name of queen can be seen clearly on another print but as her name is not written on so many documents, it is understood from the prayers that were written on behalf of Mursili II for his wife that the queen was unhealthy. “Mursili II married Danuhepa after his reign for 35 years“. Based on this conflict respect for queenship title is reflected. It shows that queen had power for a lifetime. Danuhepa succeeded to throne as ruling queen only after Mursili II’s wife has died after a 35 year of unhealthy life. The king has not married a second “ruling queen” while his wife was still alive and this reflects respect to the queenship title. (Darga, M. 1984, 32)

1.3 Importance of Queen’s Seals which Shows Political Power:

Queens performed their duties independently of the king in politics, religious rituals, foundations, donations and registration of the regulations and this was a significant progress

of this period. The seals are the proof of partnership of Tawanannas with kings on making decisions that are to be applied both in political and social life. Hence, seals have great significance about this matter. The presence of the name of queen on seals that the king has printed on every document proves that decisions were made jointly.

A common seal print of the king and Tawananna in middle of a tablet that indicates clauses of a treaty with king of Ugarit (which is at today's Syria) in Suppiluliuma I period (1344-1322 BC) is proof of ruling power of queen and her partnership to governance. The sentences on treaty are translated like: *“The seal of the great king Suppiluliuma, the favourite of the Goddess of Storms, the King of Hatti Land. The seal of the great Tawananna, the daughter of King of Babylon”*. (Alp,S. 2001, 92) The title of the king and the queen is on the hieroglyphics in the circles. (Image 1.1) (Schaeffer,C.F.-A, 1956, Fig.2)

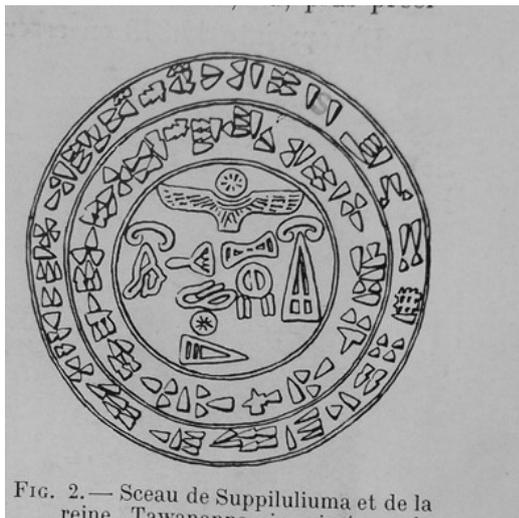


FIG. 2.— Sceau de Suppiluliuma et de la reine Tawananna.

Image 1.1: *Suppiluliuma and Tawananna's Seal*

1.4 Political Importance of Queens and Princesses in Gaining Advantage Between States:

Women in Hittite society played significant roles in gaining advantage between states. This situation is reflected on hieroglyphic treaty texts of the period. The succession of Suppiluliuma to throne is considered as a milestone for Hittite history because the Empire

Era (1380-1210 BC) has started and there have been changes in politics. In the beginning, state had concerns only about maintaining its lands but with the Empire Era, there has been a cutthroat competition to gain as much land as possible. In this context, Suppiluliuma made a treaty with Hukkana, the King of Hayasa, before taking a cruise to Syria to secure the lands in Anatolia and establish uniformity. He gave her sister as a wife to Hukkana to secure the uniformity. This is written on the resources as:

“The King of Hatti, his Majesty Suppiluliuma says these: ... And gave you my sister as your wife...” (CTH 42; Friedrich, J. 1930, 107-136)

Again with the same reason, he made his daughter marry to Mattizawa, the King of Mitanni.

“The King of Hatti; I, The great king, gave life to Mitanni land for the sake of my daughter... Gave hand to Mattizawa and gave my daughter to him as his wife...” (Karağuz, G. 2002, 210)

As a result, princesses of Hittites also have great significance as political assurance in international affairs. Hittite kings believed that only way to retain Empire is to establish lines of descent and tried two ways for that. First, they assigned their own descendants to remote regions of the Empire. Second way was to establish lines of descent over Hittite princesses. In the light of all these evidences, it can be said that women and politics were assembled under the same roof when it comes to the benefits of the empire. Queens also played important role in gaining advantage between states. Many of the princesses became queens in an other state and formed friendly relationships between Hittite Empire. Queen’s role in establishing international peace can be seen in Egypt-Hittite relations. By giving away his daughter in marriage to Ramses II, the king tried to reinforce the friendship with “a line of descent after the peace.” (Brandau, B. Schickert, H. 2004, 267) Egyptian sources describe

this important event that drew considerable interest in detail and express their admiration for the new queen by saying “*her face was as beautiful as a goddess*”. (Akurgal,E. 2002, 99)

1.5 Religious Role Of Hittite Queens:

Queens’ significant roles in religion can be associated with their effective role in politics because Hittite Empire is theocratic and the king has the religious responsibilities at his hands. Queen who attends cultural and administrative activities and has significant effect on religious institutions is also the abbess of the Goddess of Sun and named as ^{SAL}SANGA. (Yakar,J. 2000, 31; Bin-Nun,S.R,1975,197-202) “Goddess of Sun” is loved the most among all other gods in Hittite civilization period and Tawananna plays an important role in the rituals such as the chief priestess of kingdom. (Bryce, T. 1998, 96) The oath of allegiance to the king, queen and the princes by the soldiers both proves the religious authority of queen and reveals the equality of kings and queens as they both are “treated as gods after their death”. (Süel,A.1990, 239-253) The prayers of the soldiers are cited in a Hittite source as below:

“*Grant to the King, the queen, the princes and ...* ” (Singer,I. 2002, 56)

With this example, both the significance of royal family in the political success of country and substantial contribution of queens are set forward. In this context, same ritual of pouring wine and vowing are performed for queens in their funerals. (Fontanille, I. 2005, 82)

2. The Archetypal Queen to Indicate the Political Role of Hittite Queens: Puduhepa

The most significant reason for Queen Puduhepa to distinguish in the history of Hittites is the substantial sources and documents found in royal archive about this queen. Unfortunately, not enough information about all Hittite queens can be obtained from these written documents. Documents that contain information about Puduhepa are letters, prayers,

vowing texts from 13th century B.C. that belong to Puduhepa. In the light of information obtained from these documents, comments can be made about personality, authority and power of Puduhepa and role of women in political life of Hittites can be assumed considering that this represents power of other Hittite queens. **(Darga, M. 1984, 35)** Therefore, Puduhepa as the most interesting and powerful of all Hittite queens will be considered as representative of other Hittite queens and will be discussed by taking her authorities into account.

In earlier sections, significant role of women in establishing assurance in international affairs of Hittite society is discussed and examples from Suppiluliuma were given. But this method was not applied only by this king. As a matter of fact, Hittite women play same role in foreign politics during Hattusili III period. Hattusili married the Hurri origin priestess Puduhepa in order to gain the support of Hurri before the Battle of Kadesh with Egyptians. This subject is written on the sources as:

“On the way back from Egypt, I stopped by Lavazantiya... I married the daughter of priest Pentissari.” **(Desti, M. 2005, 59)**

According to some historians, there is another reason for Hattusili to marry Puduhepa. He fell out with religious functionaries for seizing the throne from his nephew. This marriage would be a perfect opportunity to win the priests over. According to Akurgal, Hattusili won the support of religious circles to gain political power by saying “Goddess Ishtar wants so” and marrying Puduhepa.

In earlier sections, it is indicated that the Hittite queens stayed in power even though their husbands died and ruled the country as Tawananna with her son. Puduhepa was also closely involved in the governance of the country by using her title after the death of her husband Hattusili III. Further, Puduhepa has taken over the responsibilities and missions of the king for some time after her son Tuthaliya IV lost his father at his early ages. The

involvement of Puduhepa in the governance of the country is both an indicator of the fact that the queens have governed the state with almost equal rights with the kings and they were the second authorized person after the king to hold the power.

2.1 Role of Puduhepa in Politics:

Puduhepa have also played a significant role in political life as a mother. According to the information obtained from the royal archive, there was a problem originated probably from the sharing of the governance of religious and state affairs between Puduhepa and her young “daughter-in-law”. In these documents, it is written that the court members and the concubines fell out, and some took parts with Tawananna (Puduhepa), some with the young queen. In this fight for the power, “both sides started smear campaigns against each other”. (Ünal,A. 2005, 12) The important point here is that King Tuthaliya kept his impartiality. Because of his appreciation to women, he didn’t want to leave neither his mother nor his wife in a difficult situation. Puduhepa’s significance in politics as a mother is also revealed by another Ugarit origin seal print. On the outer legend of the seal that belongs to Tuthaliya, the king is identified as “the son of Hattusili and Puduhepa”. (Image 1.2) (Schaeffer,C.F.-A., 1956, Fig 24) The presence of mother’s name on the seal of the print proves the significance of Hittite queens in politics as a mother.



Image 1.2: Seal of Tuthaliya IV

The most important feature of Puduhepa in political life is having her seal on Kadesh treaty (the first written treaty of history) signed with Egypt after the Battle of Kadesh that went on for 17 years. The translation of the seal on the back of the silver tablet that the treaty was written is like this: *“The seal of the princess of Hattusa land, the dearest of the Sun Goddess Arinna the mistress of the earth, the servant of Goddess, the daughter of Kizzuwatna land Puduhepa.”* (Darga,M. 1993, 202) (Image 2.1)



Image 2.1: *Puduhepa and Hattusili's Seal*

Puduhepa's authorities are not limited to aforementioned missions. The queen often deals with economic and legal activities along with diplomatic issues. She was in charge of the court board which was established to find the animals, valuable metals and other commodities that were stolen from the Hittite palace by some high-ranking officials. It is denoted that all the investigations about this matter are studiously entered in the register of Hittite archives. (Otten, H. 1975, 13)

The best example for Puduhepa's legal authorities is a trial that takes place in Hittitology literature as "Ukkura Matter" which can be incorporated into international maritime law. This matter was revealed when an ancient document was found in Ugarit archaeological excavations. In this document written in Akkadian language, the incident is described as a situation caused by the sinking of an Ugarit ship outside its territorial waters. There is a seal print of Puduhepa on the front face of the tablet, and the queen has written her

decision on this matter in the style of a letter on behalf of the Hittite king. The sealing of the indemnity by Puduhepa for the sake of the Hittite king's justice is another example of the queen's political power. The seal of the queen is only printed on official documents when the king is on a religious mission away from the palace or at times of war. These sentences are written on the document:

“Her majesty rendered the verdict below: ‘let the head of the Ugarit sailors swear without lying: Then Sukku will compensate for his ship and the commodities within.’ (Darga,M. 1974, 944)

The queen has dealt with economic issues as well as legal matters. It is denoted that her name is printed on land donation documents. These documents, especially independent seals issued on behalf of her name, shows that Hittite queens were also closely involved with economic issues.

Queen's broad authority in diplomacy can be conveyed through the relationships with Egypt. It is possible to see the importance of the queen in foreign affairs through the treaty that were signed after 17 years of battle between Hittites and Egypt. Presented as the first written treaty of history, this text has the common seal of the king and the queen, and this indicates the broad diplomatic authority that the queen possesses. Seeing the broadness of queen's authorities, “pharaoh Ramses II has sent 26 letters to Hattusili, 13 letters to Puduhepa after the treaty.” (Darga,M. 1984, 42) The sentences below are written on one letter:

“Tell the Queen of Hatti land, the great queen Puduhepa: ... You sister, may you be good!” (Alp,S. 2002, 24)

This sentence reveals the respect that the pharaoh has for Puduhepa. Hence it can be seen that the pharaoh wanted to keep up with Hattusili III and endeavored to show that the

women from his family played significant roles in state affairs. In parallel with this attitude, Tuya the Mother Queen of Egypt and Nefertari the wife of the great king wrote letters to Puduhepa. But these letters didn't have the characteristics of politics. "The only person that seems to present opinions about current issues is Puduhepa." (**Brandau, B and Schickert, H. 2004, 267**)

As a result, queens' political rights that were discussed in the first section are shown over Puduhepa in this section.

Conclusion:

According to TOK (Theory of Knowledge) lecture given under IB program, the foundation to reach true knowledge is to stay away from social taboos as much as possible, to convey historical event not only with their chronological order, to try synthesizing the obtained data by objective evaluation. Therefore, examination of history is dependent upon an accurate interpretation of the past with a cause-effect relation. Within this scope, the political role of women on political life in Hittite society is examined. The goal is to discuss how queens in Hittite civilization were given political rights, in other words, how women played significant roles in politics. For this, roles of queens are mentioned in the light of documents from Hittite Kingdom Archive and the authorities of the queens are reflected on the example of queen Puduhepa were made. Also, by considering the queen as the only effective woman in politics at this period, the research question is limited to only the women of this status.

According to the obtained data, this essay is grouped into sections which reflect role of the queens in politics. Therefore; the essay is divided into two main sections. The first section gives general information about queens and their role in politics. According to the data, the queens took place in political life in three main titles: with "Tawananna" title in

domestic and foreign politics; with “mother” title in domestic politics; and with their religious title in rituals. The information is obtained from the documents of Kingdom Archive that are deciphered approximately 3000 years after they had written. Moreover, seals are solid proof for queen’s active (considering the fact that it was 3000 years ago) political life. In the second part, all of these roles are solidified from the example of Puduhepa. It is determined as a result of the comparison made with Egypt civilization that Hittite queens have a more effective role in political life.

To sum up, the queens played an effective role in international politics, governance, and in religious matters, as the regime was theocratic in Hittite society. They don’t have as broad authorities as the king but as it can be seen from the texts, seals and official correspondences, they stand in the second place after the king. Therefore, it can be said that considering the fact that the world was male- dominated society about 3000 years ago, queens had larger roles in political life in Hittite society.

As a result, it can be said that queens contributed to the governance and politics at Hittite Empire Era.

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Pictures:

Image 1.1.: Frédéric, Claude, and Schaeffer, Armand. Ugaritica III. Fig:2 Paris: P.Guetner, 1956.

Image 1.2: Frédéric, Claude, and Schaeffer, Armand. Ugaritica III. Fig:24 Paris: P.Guetner, 1956. Print

Image 2.2: Darga, Muhibbe. Hitit Sanatı. İstanbul: Akbank Anadolu Sanat Yayınları, 1992. Print.